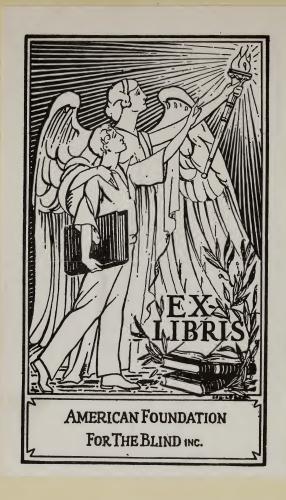
BEOWULF GUIDE DOG



ERNEST LEWIS



15 WEST 16th STREET NEW YORK, N.Y., 10011



BEOWULF

BETH A Sheep Dog

"The best dog story I ever read and the only one I shall reread."—The Times Literary Supplement.

"I implore every one to beg, borrow, steal or buy 'Beth.' To buy is, of course, the best."—Hugh Walpole.

"Authentic, with no trace of nature faking... A grand book, say I, and one that deserves to become a classic."
—Herschel Brickell, in *The New York Post*.

"A modern masterpiece of dog literature."—The New York Herald-Tribune.

THE HIGH-METTLED RACER

Mr. Lewis is successful in conveying the atmosphere of stable and track, and lovers of horses will find pleasure in this volume. The narrative is told straightforwardly and is rich in color.

—The New York Times Book Review.

Published by E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC.

BEOWULF

Guide Dog To The Blind

ERNEST LEWIS, pseud,

Vosoy, Ernest Blakeman



NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC.
PUBLISHERS

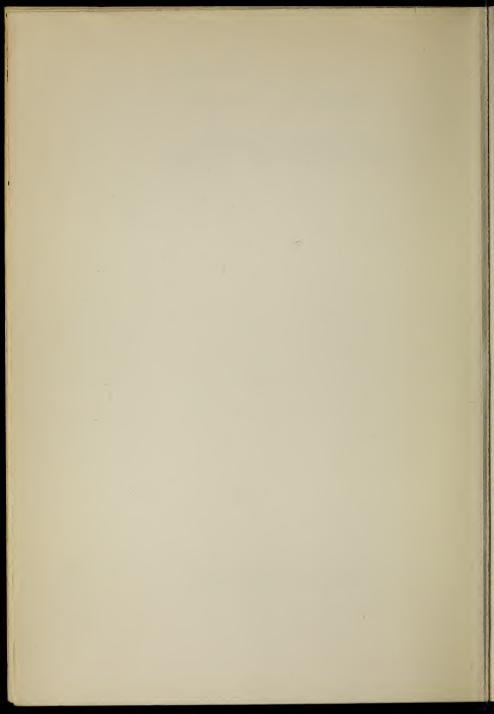
HV2345

BEOWULF: COPYRIGHT 1936
BY E. P. DUTTON & CO., INC. ALL RIGHTS
RESERVED:: PRINTED IN THE U. S. A.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA BY THE POLYGRAPHIC COMPANY OF AMERICA, N.Y.

THIS BOOK IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED TO

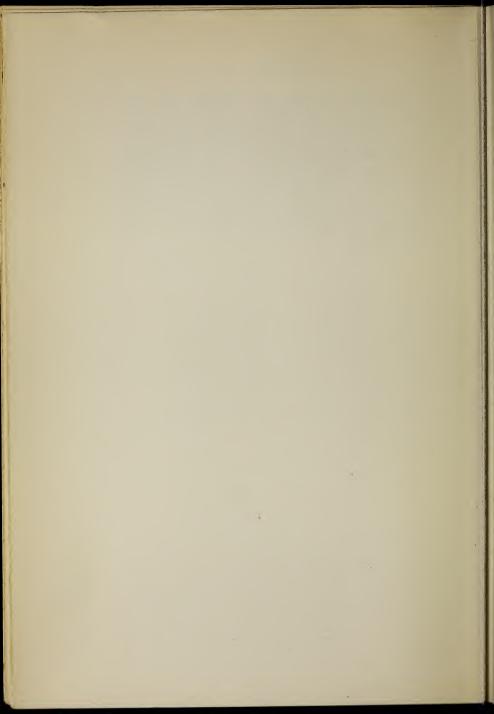
THE PINNACLE OF LOYALTY
THE GUIDE DOGS FOR THE BLIND



NOTE

In those parts of this book dealing with the Guide Dogs for the Blind, all the work and performances of the dogs described, save those of Beowulf, and even some of his, are absolutely true: only names of towns have sometimes been altered. For this reason I wish particularly to say that neither in this, nor in any other connection, is any reference intended to any living person.

E. L.



CONTENTS

CHAP.				PAGE
I	THE FRONTIER GUARD.	• ,		·I
II	BEOWULF VON STORMBURG			8
III	THE BANNERDALE TRIALS			17
IV	BESS			25
v	ALAN STUART	•		34
VI	LOST	•		47
VII	THE WILD DOG OF BRUNDHOM	ME DA	LE	56
VIII	CAPTURE			67
IX	THE BLACK CATTLE .			76
X	THE PEKE AND BEOWULF AT	wor	RK	91
XI	THE POLICE DOG TRIALS	•		108
XII	A QUIET STALK			119
XIII	THE WOUNDED STAG .			129
XIV	ALAN FIRST HEARS OF THE	GUII	ÞΕ	
	DOGS	•	•	144
XV	EVENING	•	•	150
XVI	THE ICELAND PONY .	•		161
	127			

ix

CONTENTS

снар.			PAGE
XVII	THE GUIDE DOGS OF THE BLIND		176
	THE GUIDE SCHOOL		_
XIX	THE FAILURE OF BEOWULF .	•	195
xx	SEPARATION		206
XXI	REUNION		217
XXII	BEOWULF AT WORK		224
XXIII	LEST HARM BEFALL		237
	THE BRAVE ADVENTURE .		
	THE ASCENT OF THE RED PIKE		
	THE DESCENT		
	BEOWULF ON HIS OWN .		
	MORNING		
XXVIII	MOKINING		

*CHAPTER I

THE FRONTIER GUARD

Victor Mourad went on duty at midnight. He was given, as usual, the beat third from the guardhouse, and warned to be extra careful as considerable quantities of costly and pernicious drugs were believed to have been recently smuggled over the frontier in the district. He walked out to his beat with his big sable dog, Beowulf von Stormburg, walking on a slack leash close beside his left leg. Mourad would have described Beowulf as a German shepherd dog, though in England, probably with less accuracy, he would have been called an Alsatian.

The sector, which Mourad had been detailed to patrol, consisted of a length of low hill sparsely wooded with conifers. Although it was late January and freezing hard, there was no snow actually on his beat; only the distant mountains stood up white and clear against the stars. The frontier boundary followed the height of land.

Mourad had been on duty possibly half an

hour, and he was standing for the moment in the doorway of his hut, to be sheltered from the thin hill wind, when he became aware that Beowulf, who had been lying at his feet, was now standing up and alert. He dropped his hand on the dog's back just behind the withers, and felt him quite tense and rigid. For nearly a minute neither dog nor man moved, then Beowulf growled, so low that the sound was inaudible to his master, even at the distance of less than three feet; but Mourad knew that he growled for he could feel the vibrations through his hand on Beowulf's back; indeed, it was for that reason that he kept his hand upon him, for Beowulf needed no steadying.

Mourad listened for a moment longer, but could hear nothing. He said in a low voice, "Beowulf Such," and as Beowulf started to walk quickly away, nearly straight into the wind, he followed on the end of the leash. After going possibly a hundred yards he stumbled over a tree-root in the dark, and fell. At once he heard a man, a little before him, running rapidly down the hillside, on his side of the frontier. Without waiting to get to his feet he slipped the leash, saying, "Allons Such." And Beowulf at

THE FRONTIER GUARD

once raced away in the direction of the crashing noise ahead.

The smuggler, born and bred on the hills, and used to much travelling on dark nights, made wonderfully good time, running and leaping down the hillside like a goat, but, fast as he went, his speed was nothing to that of the dog behind him, for Beowulf was going like a hawk. He raced up on his man, and, springing from above and behind him, he landed somewhere on the smuggler's shoulders, throwing him heavily with the force of the impact, forward on to his face. After the fall Beowulf went rolling away down the hillside; and the man made another effort to get away, but he had not gone half a dozen strides before Beowulf seized him by the heel, and by pulling to one side made the man cross his legs, and again threw him. The smuggler then lay quite still while the dog stood over him, ready to deal with any further resistance.

Mourad followed as quickly as he could, but though he had been able partly to follow the sounds of the chase, he presently could hear nothing except the rushing of a little fussy hill-stream near which Beowulf had brought his man to bay. He called "Gib laut," and

Beowulf instantly barked, telling him where he was.

Mourad hurried up and, taking in the situation, gave Beowulf the order "Setzen." 1 He told the man to get up, which he did, the while complaining bitterly that he, an innocent man lost in the woods, had been set upon and attacked by a savage and dangerous dog. Mourad pointed out that the so-called savage dog had neither broken the skin anywhere nor even torn his clothes; and he asked him where he was supposed to be going, to which the man replied that he had left a nearby village, which he named, after a late and convivial supper with a friend; that he was then going home to another village close by; and that the night being dark he had somehow lost the way, with which he was not very familiar. And he admitted that it was possible that his head might not have been as clear after as before supper.

Mourad felt quickly over the man, but found no package sufficiently bulky to be any contraband goods, so he told him that he must wait, while he sent Beowulf back to search over the line. He snatched the man's cap off his head and held it out for a moment for Beowulf to sniff.

THE FRONTIER GUARD

As the dog cantered away on the heel line, the man became more voluble than ever, repeatedly protesting his innocence, and complaining that if he were not home soon his wife would become anxious. When Beowulf returned the reason for all this became apparent, for he was carrying carefully in his mouth a neat oilskin package. Mourad took the package from the dog, who sat smartly before him to deliver it, and bent over to examine it. While his attention was thus occupied, the smuggler drew a small revolver from its hiding-place beneath his left armpit, and shot him through the head.

The shot was a command for Beowulf to attack, the which he promptly obeyed. As he sprang at his man the latter fired again, hitting him in the breast; and the shock of the striking bullet knocked him over. The smuggler waited for no more but dashed away down the streamside. He had scarcely run fifty yards before Beowulf had got to his feet, run up, and seized him once more by the leg. The man kept his feet, and, turning, fired again, wounding Beowulf in the flank; whereupon the dog dropped the man's leg and seized the right forearm, gripping with such force that he compelled him to drop the revolver. The smuggler was then in an un-

pleasant predicament, but he stood quite still; and Beowulf, who had been trained to cease from attack on the criminal ceasing resistance, released his hold and stood back, waiting for his master to come up. He stood perfectly still save for his tongue, which slid in and out of his mouth as he panted; while a slow stream of blood flowed sluggishly down his near fore-leg, and dripped from his pastern; a smaller stream trickled down over his hock, and made a little dark pool about one hind foot. From time to time he barked in the hope of bringing Mouradup.

But Mourad would never come to him again.

The man stood and waited, and presently Beowulf lay down, still with his eye on his prisoner; after a while he began, though watchfully, to lick the wound in his chest.

Time dragged by, and Beowulf began to get uneasy; he looked more and more often over his shoulder in the direction in which his master lay, and less often towards his prisoner, though the slightest movement of the latter brought his head round with a jerk.

He got up, whining; lay down again; got up once more; and finally trotted stiffly back to the dead body of his master. He sniffed over his face, then sat back on his haunches and

THE FRONTIER GUARD

howled his grief to the stars. The smuggler, hearing him howl, picked up his revolver and made off as quickly as he could. He had to leave his contraband package, which was close beside Mourad, but, except for his fright and a little stiffness due to standing still for a long time, he was none the worse. Beowulf had scarcely broken his skin, seizing always, even the revolver arm, only to hold and not to tear.

It happened that Mourad had fallen close to the side of the little stream, where the sound of the water and the steep sides of the ravine prevented either the shots or Beowulf's mournful howling from being heard by the frontier guards on either side. And it was not until the guard was changed, and a search for Mourad made, that the tragedy was discovered. Beowulf recognised the guards' uniform, and possibly some of the men wearing it, for he made no objection when his master was carried away, and he himself leashed up and led after.

CHAPTER II

BEOWULF VON STORMBURG

On examination, Beowulf's wounds proved not to be as serious as might have been expected. The bullet which had entered his breast did so near the shoulder, passed between the humerus and the ribs and out behind the elbow. The first and second ribs were cracked, but not so seriously that they would in any way interfere with the shoulder action when they should have healed. The bullet in the flank had traversed the length of the quarter, and passed out beneath the buttock without touching any bone.

Although there seemed no reason to suppose that Beowulf would not regain his full physical powers within a reasonable time, it was decided to draft him from active service.

Nothing was known of Beowulf's behaviour at the time of Mourad's death, except the fact that he was found lying, a good deal shot up and very distressed, beside the body. It could not be known that after Mourad's death, he had a second time set upon his assailant, and held

him for nearly an hour, until his anxiety for his master overcame his training. Beowulf had always shown himself to be quite fearless in the face of blank cartridges and punishment in his training work, but the evidence was rather against his having behaved well in his first encounter with live bullets; and it was not thought altogether safe to rely on him again, when this experience might have broken his nerve.

There was another important argument in favour of drafting him, and that was the length of time which it was likely to take before another handler would be able to use him. That a long time would be necessary seemed almost certain from his first training. When Beowulf had come off the farm, where he had been walked along with a litter brother since puppy days, and into the hands of a professional trainer, he had been found to have that rather sensitive nature, which so often goes with the highest courage, and which, if allied with an otherwise suitable temper, often makes training comparatively easy; yet is the most easily spoilt in incompetent hands. Beowulf's trainer was a first-rate hand; he thoroughly understood the material with which he had to deal; and though Beowulf fretted for a few days in his new and strange surroundings and his first

experience of kennel life, the trainer very soon gained his complete confidence. Beowulf learnt easily and willingly; he was full of life and dash; and as he was inclined to be sensitive, he was always attentive to command.

Beowulf was trained for man-work, and was particularly brilliant at it. He would attack in the face of any punishment with the utmost resolution; yet he never attacked wildly or indiscriminately, and was ever ready to desist on command, or on the "criminal" giving up and standing still. When he was more or less trained, the frontier guard, who was to handle him in his serious work, came to the training school, that their work might finish and be perfected together. Beowulf was handed over to his new master, and his training ceased altogether until he should have given his affection to him.

It was then that the first difficulty in his training arose, for Beowulf absolutely refused to have anything to do with the guard; he fretted continually for his old trainer; and got wildly excited when he saw or winded him, or even anything which reminded him of him. It was the necessary practice of the trainer, after he had handed the dog over to his new handler, to pay no attention to him, and to ignore entirely any advances

from the dog; for the dog for such work could have but one master, and he alone must give him all his orders, even though he did it under the direction of the trainer. As Beowulf obstinately refused to forget his old trainer or take to the other man, and the trainer could see that his own indifference was not enough, he gave Beowulf a chance to come up to him, and then cuffed him sharply back to his would-be handler, hoping that that would have some effect. But Beowulf, instead of being affronted, was overjoyed that his old master had noticed him at all, and he showed the first signs of pleasure since he had been handed over to the new man. case seemed hopeless, another dog was found for the guard, and a new procedure tried with Beowulf.

Another guard was to be supplied with a dog. This man had had dogs before, and he was known to be a really good man; so Beowulf was sent away to him, and stopped with him alone until he should have taken to him. The change of place helped Beowulf to forget his trainer, and it being the nature of a dog to have a master of some sort, he presently settled down all right with his new man. This was Mourad. The two then returned to the training school,

where the finishing touches were put to Beowulf, and their team work perfected, by a trainer unknown to him.

Considering the trouble that had been necessary to get Beowulf, even as a young dog, to take to Mourad, a man known to be a good hand, it now seemed likely that little less time and trouble would be necessary to get him fixed up with a new handler than would be required to train a young dog. It might not be easy to find a young dog as brilliant as Beowulf had been, but against that there was the risk that Beowulf's confidence had been spoilt. Whether that was the case or not would not easily be ascertained, until Beowulf was once more working happily with another man. The trainer who had originally trained him could not help, for he had left the school to be head of a large establishment in America.

At the time of Mourad's murder an Oxford undergraduate, named Leverson, had been in Switzerland for the winter sports, and he was then returning to England by a very roundabout route for the sake of his education. He heard of the tragedy, which made a considerable noise at the time, and also by chance that Beowulf could be bought from the authorities. He had,

in fact, very little use for any dog, and none at all for a fully trained police dog, but he was attracted by the idea of owning a dog that was already something of a notoriety. He was also taken, once he had seen him, by Beowulf's grand head and expression and generally magnificent appearance; for, though failing possibly in some of the finer show points, Beowulf was a most striking individual. Leverson bought him, and on his return to London arranged with a whole-sale firm, dealing in dog foods, appliances, and freight, that Beowulf should be shipped over to Southampton as soon as he was fit to travel, and consigned to the necessary quarantine.

Beowulf was naturally a highly strung, rather nervous dog, and six months of solitary confinement in quarantine was not the best thing for him at any time. It was impossible for him to get any proper exercise, or any companionship from man or dog, although he could hear other dogs perpetually barking around him. And to make matters worse, he had to go into quarantine at a time when he had recovered properly neither from his wounds nor the death of his master. The result was that at the end of the six months his nerves were in a wretched state.

He remained in quarantine a week or two after

the required time was up; because Leverson was going on a walking tour in the Lake district in September; but until then he was to be in London, and he did not want to be bothered with Beowulf before he actually started north. Then he had Beowulf sent up to Waterloo in the afternoon; and the two of them took the Night Scot from Euston the same night.

Beowulf was not used to travelling; Leverson had a sleeper, so he could not take him in the carriage with him, and the guard would not take him in the van without a muzzle. So the double journey, muzzled, in the noisy guard's van, did not improve his nerves. Besides, before Leverson took him over at Euston, he had been in the hands of half a dozen different people, guards, porters, and parcels office officials, so Leverson seemed to him exactly the same as all the others, and in no way like a new master.

Beowulf was really only too ready to adopt some master, whom he could trust and respect, and to whom he could give his allegiance, but unfortunately for him Leverson was not the sort of man into whose hands he should have fallen. He not only had no real experience of dogs, but he also rather regarded Beowulf as a sort of wild and savage animal. He still believed that there was some good reason behind the perfectly senseless name, Alsation Wolf Dog, with which the breed was dignified on its first introduction into this country, and which has puzzled a good many people. He privately thought that Beowulf probably really had some wolf blood in him, and that his name had been given him for that reason. He was anxious to hush up this supposed lapse on the part of one of Beowulf's ancestors, so he changed his name to Sandy, thereby jettisoning the only thing that Beowulf could cling to and understand, his old name. As Leverson was also just a trifle afraid of Beowulf, he destroyed any hope of confidence between the two of them.

Not only was there Leverson's stupidity and Beowulf's shyness and temporary nerves between them, there was also his training; not his manwork, for he was not in the least savage, but the suspicion of strangers that had been fostered in him. For instance, it had been necessary for him to be taught not to take food from strangers, lest some unscrupulous person, with whose dealings his work interfered, should poison him.

Any healthy dog is more or less always hungry; and though Beowulf, always by nature a one-man dog, would never have gone begging from strangers, it was not enough unless he definitely

could be relied upon always to refuse anything offered. The training for this was simple enough, but not designed to make him over-friendly with strangers. A number of people, other than his trainer and unknown to Beowulf, were invited to offer him food with the left hand, and as he put out his muzzle to accept it, to cuff him hard with the right hand across the face. Very little indeed of such work was necessary with a dog of Beowulf's nature, but that and other parts of his training tended to make him reserved and aloof, which indeed was largely what was required. And this reserve Leverson, addressing him as Sandy, was not the man to break down.

CHAPTER III

THE BANNERDALE TRIALS

On the same afternoon that Beowulf and his owner left Euston for their walking tour in the Lake district, two men and five sheepdogs might have been seen returning from the fell to Lower Mirehouse Farm, Stonethwaite. Jack Trout, the tenant of the farm and owner of the dogs, was a stocky middle-aged man with a red face and a shock of grey hair protruding from under his cap. The day had been hot and his jacket was tied by the sleeves across one shoulder, and the bottoms of his trousers were thrust inside his garters. The other, tall and slight, was still in his twenties and, in spite of his old and shabby clothes, bore the unmistakable signs of breeding.

This was Alan Stuart, the parson at Stone-thwaite, where there had been a Stuart at the vicarage nearly as long as there had been one of the same name at the Manor. The two families were now only very distantly related, and only the name recalled the old half-feudal days when the squire and the parson had ruled the

village between them; and it had been desirable from the point of view of the squire, in whose gift the living lay, to have a brother or other near relative in the vicarage; and so turn one, who might have been his rival, into his partner. The days of sheeting erring young women in the church porch and other similar customs were long past, but the living of Stonethwaite was still handed from father to son as a matter of course and without question.

Alan Stuart often enough helped Trout with the shepherding, possibly from a desire to understand as far as he could the life of his people; though if asked, he was wont to say that he would as soon work one or two good dogs on sheep, as spend a day after grouse with a brace of high-And it would indeed have been class setters. surprising, if Trout's dogs had not proved an attraction to anyone as interested in dogs as he was. Of the five then with them, the black-andtan dog Kep, though well advanced in years, had in his time been a real good one, both at trials and on a fell. He had won many trials, as well as being three times in the English team at the Sheepdog International, and twice in the last twelve, chosen from all three countries to run on the final day. As he grew older, he became rather dour and stiff to handle; and, though he could still run a brilliant course, he could no longer be relied upon. Trout had given up running him at triåls, and now kept him entirely for work at fell, where his great sense and experience made him as useful as ever.

The pair which Trout then had for running at trials were two bitches, and hard they were to beat. It was difficult to say which was the best: Bess was probably the most brilliant, but she had a very keen, excitable temper, which called for great care on the part of her handler. Nell was as quiet as Bess was keen, and though she lacked something of Bess's quickness, she made up for it by keeping her sheep extra quiet; and so she often made her own luck when other dogs' sheep seemed scared and wild. The other two were young dogs got by Kep out of Bess, and though as yet only half-broken, both had what Trout called "a grand offer."

The party moved but slowly, for they were bringing a ewe home with them, which had been too badly struck by flies to be left on the fell; she was feeling pretty sick, and could hardly achieve a mile and a half an hour. The sick ewe and the dogs had scarcely been bestowed in their respective places at the farm, and the

two men gone into a very late dinner—for it was then close on four o'clock—when an expensive Daimler came bumping up the rough track to the farm; while every bump, to judge by the chauffeur's face, caused that supercilious individual the acutest agony.

The occupants of the car, an American and his wife, announced that they had come in search of a good dog. Trout was unwilling to sell any of his old dogs, but he offered either of the Kep-Bess puppies at twenty-five guineas each. He recounted some of the trial successes of both parents, and offered to run any of them for the Americans' benefit. The Americans were most difficult people with whom to do any business, as they not only knew nothing whatever of the subject, but they were also fully convinced that Trout was out to swindle them.

There was to be a trial on the following day at Bannerdale, at which both the old bitches had been entered, but unfortunately Trout had a land-graves' meeting, and he could not attend it. The outcome of it all was that Trout asked Alan Stuart to take Bess and Nell to the trial; and the American agreed to buy one of the young dogs, if he was satisfied with Bess's running.

Alan rather reluctantly consented. He would

have been quite pleased to take them to the trial in other circumstances, but the deal would mean quite a bit to Trout, and he doubted his ability to do the dogs justice. He had never actually run a dog at a trial, and though both Bess and Nell worked well for him at fell, he might not have that extra bit of command over them which would be required at the trial. Bess especially seemed to be very fond of him, but in spite of, or possibly because of that, she ran extra keenly for him and was not easy to hold. Trout made light of his objections, assuring Alan that they would run as well for him as for himself. He was so used to running dogs, and it came so naturally to him, that he probably really believed that it would be the same for Alan.

The next morning Alan came early to Lower Mirehouse Farm. He took Bess and Nell out on the fell, where he worked them on sheep, twisting and turning them about a good deal, as they would have to do in the trial. And finally he worked them both together, as they were entered in the double dog stake as well as in the singles. He then walked the two miles to Fourfoot Cross, where he picked up the 'bus to Bannerdale. On entering the 'bus both dogs

immediately disappeared under the seats, a thing they were always expected to do when travelling with Trout; and they were no more seen till it was time to get off, and Alan called them out; when they caused no little surprise to some later arrivals, from beneath whose seats they emerged.

Alan arrived at the trial in good time, as he was anxious to run the dogs fairly early in the morning, because sheep as a rule were then easier to manage than in the afternoon, when they had been longer in the gathering pen. When he found that the sheep were the little quick white-faced cheviots, probably the wildest of all breeds, he was doubly pleased to have got there in good time. At Bannerdale, as at most trials, there was no set order of running, and he could run more or less when he chose.

The first stake was the local, for dogs the property of farmers, or their shepherds, residing within a twelve-mile radius of Bannerdale, and which had never won a first or second prize in an open stake. Neither Bess nor Nell was eligible on either count, but Alan watched the running closely for any tendency of the sheep to hang in any particular direction, or away from any spots—a thing which often happens, due to the nature of the ground, or presence of the

THE BANNERDALE TRIALS

judges or crowd, and which it is difficult to foresee until a few courses have been run.

The running for the local stake was not very interesting; most of the dogs were unused to trials, and were not sufficiently finely broken; they were hard on their turns and lacking in style, so that the wild little cheviots were soon galloping all over the place. Handlers and dogs became excited, and things got worse than ever.

There was one hired shepherd, an old, old man, who ran a moderate sort of a dog, which with difficulty took his sheep round the course and up to the pen's mouth. The pen consisted of three hurdles set in triangular form, except that two of the hurdles, instead of meeting at one of the angles, were set a little apart, and thus formed the entrance into the pen. The dog brought his three sheep up to the pen's mouth, and then lay down to command at a little distance. For some time the shepherd stood quietly on the opposite side of the sheep to his dog; the sheep, between the two, milling round and round at the pen's mouth. Presently the man moved up a little nearer, and then waited, apparently losing interest in the proceedings.

Suddenly he waved his arms and shouted, and the startled sheep bolted clean into the pen. Alan was amazed, for he well knew that any sort of a hooroosh at pen is almost always fatal, and that it is a thousand to one that the frightened sheep will bolt in every direction. Yet the old shepherd, from his great experience, knew the exact moment when the sheep were in such a position that a shock would send them into the pen. Nor was it a fluke, for he later did much the same thing with a second dog which he ran.

Alan watched a few courses in the open stake and then ran Nell. Her sheep were wild, and all her tact and gentleness could not get them settled down. With the sheep going fast, she had to come very quickly to either side to keep them straight and through the obstacles. Trout might have got her to do it, but it was against her careful nature, and she would not come quick enough for Alan.

Bess came quickly enough; there had never been any doubt but that she would. But before describing her run, the course, over which the trials took place, must be explained.

CHAPTER IV

BESS

THE course was shaped like an arrow head, the handler standing on the point of the head, while the sheep were turned out some 300 yards away, as it were on the shaft. The handler sent his dog out on either hand he pleased. The dog got hold of his sheep, and brought them straight up to his master, through one obstacle on the way. The obstacles were a pair of hurdles set a few feet apart. The dog, after fetching his sheep around behind the handler, who stood still throughout, drove them away half right, down the edge of the arrow head; through another obstacle; then across the handler's front, along the base of the arrow-head; through a third obstacle; and so back to the pen, which was close to the point where the handler stood. Not until the sheep were at the pen, could the handler leave his position to assist his dog. After penning the dog was to shed, that is split off, one of the three sheep, and wear, or hold it up to his master. No re-try was allowed for any

obstacle which had been missed, but the course was to be completed as though the obstacle had been hit.

The sheep were wild; and the course was so laid out that there was scarcely room enough between the obstacles. Especially was this the case at the second: the sheep, after coming round behind the handler, and being turned away once more, were very inclined to bolt away from the crowd, and were often past the obstacle before the dog could get to them. Any haste in sending the dog after them only hurried them on, and made things worse. At the time when Bess came to run, no competitor had penned, and at the same time brought his sheep through all the obstacles: in fact none had hit every obstacle at all.

Alan knew that he had Bess's keenness to contend with, and that he must be extra careful with the wild sheep. He sent her out as quietly as he could, and kept her right back off her sheep during the fetch. When the sheep hung to one side or the other, and it was necessary to bring Bess out to either flank to bend them back, Alan did not give her the flanking whistles if he could help it, but he used the voice, and that as quietly as possible, and tried to keep her walking.

Everything was perfect until the sheep were almost through the second obstacle; then at the last moment they hung out to the right, the outside. Alan brought Bess out right quickly, and the sheep went through the hurdles; but they started galloping and were soon across the base of the arrow-head and opposite the third obstacle. Bess went cantering on steadily, out wide of her sheep; and if only they would settle down, nothing could be better. But they were well in their stride and showed no signs of stopping.

Alan, anxious to keep Bess quiet, waited as long as he dared before giving her the right-hand whistle, which would send her on to turn them in towards the obstacle. He waited too long, the sheep were going by, and in a last effort to retrieve disaster he called:

"Bess, get up!"

Bess flashed from a canter to a stretching gallop, and shot up on her sheep. Even now her beautiful style did not desert her, and she was still wide of them, not into them.

The sheep were turning, and Alan whistled: down went Bess. The turn was scarcely enough.

"Get up!"

Bess raced three strides; and smash down

again to the whistle. The sheep wheeled through the hurdles, and galloped on towards the pen.

Every obstacle had been hit, and the crowd clapped; but Alan knew that with Bess so boiled up, he would scarcely get her settled down in time to pen his sheep within the eight minutes which were allowed for the whole course.

Bess in her keenness got up without the order, and started to come on after the sheep, but Alan put her down again, and he made her wait more than half a precious minute while she cooled her brain.

He did his utmost while at pen to keep her quiet, but he was only human, and could not forget, that if he could but pen, he must nearly win the stake; and it was impossible altogether for him to hide his anxiety from Bess. It was at pen that his own lack of experience told most heavily against them; though at one moment he had two of the three sheep in the pen, the third would not join them, and the others bolted out once more. When finally the time whistle blew, the sheep, Bess, and himself were so excited that an extra half-hour might have seen them no nearer success.

The American, Van Ryn, less tactful than some,

voiced what was perhaps the general view among the onlookers, when he said:

"Wall, I reckoned you sure had 'em taped, but I guess you wasted yore time between the last gate and the fold: hein!"

Alan, though he had all the Church's love of truth, saw no need to enlarge on Bess's excitement, which the American had evidently failed to notice, but he told nothing but the truth when he said:

"Well, you see, I haven't much experience, and that tells against the dog."

The open stake was won by a bitch called Fan, who ran a grand course. She narrowly missed the second obstacle through no fault of her own; but, keeping her sheep walking throughout, she had them quiet at pen, and experienced little difficulty there.

Her shed was sensational: she held the sheep up between herself and her handler, and was ready at any moment to come in between the last one and its companions, and cut it off; but the sheep never left any sort of a gap, and her master had no chance to call her in. At last one sheep dropped back a little, but there was still no daylight between them, and its head was still over the quarters of the one in front. There

seemed no chance, but the man pointed between them with his stick, saying,

"Fan, this!"

Fan came in like a flash, literally shouldering her way between the two. Then turned on herself to prevent them closing once more behind her. Once shed, the sheep had no chance of breaking back past Fan, who wore it easily for as long as required.

Alan had not done much in the singles to further the sale of Trout's pup, but he still had a chance in the double dog stakes. The double course was the same: one dog was to be sent out by the handler on each side, and the two were to work the sheep around between them. They were not allowed to cross over but each must keep his own side, that is to say, the dog sent out on the man's right hand must keep on the left of the sheep throughout, and vice versa. There were six sheep, and before penning one of the dogs must shed off three; those were then penned with one dog, while the other dog watched the other three. As soon as the first lot were penned, the first dog must lie down in the pen's mouth and keep them there, while the man proceeded to a second pen and penned the other three sheep with his second dog.

Alan sent Bess out on the right hand and Nell on the left, so that during the drive Nell would be on the right, or outside, of the sheep; and it would be possible to keep Bess fairly quiet on the inside. They ran a good course, each being quite staunch to her own whistle. It is in this that the beauty of double dog stakes lies: the two dogs were trained on different whistles, and each acted instantly on her own, and entirely ignored her partner's. Trout always had his different dogs on two or three different sets of whistles, which he thought more stylish and quicker than the method adopted by some, of having all their dogs on the same whistles and commands, and always preceding the command with the dog's name. Besides, he thought that on the different whistle system a keen dog was less likely to take the other dog's whistlealways something of a temptation.

Bess shed off the three without much difficulty, and Alan left her to watch them while he took Nell to pen the first lot. It was here that he did not do so well, and the time was slipping by. Once or twice out of the corner of his eye he saw Bess fidgeting with her sheep, and he twice called "Lie down, Bess!" When he last saw her, she had her sheep right up against her pen,

and was still nagging at them. After that things at his pen became critical, and he could not even

spare her a glance.

Finally he had Nell's lot almost in, but he was painfully aware that the twelve minutes allowed for the whole double course must be nearly up, and that he had little chance of penning with Bess also. Suddenly there was a murmur among the crowd which swelled to a roar of cheering and clapping, that drowned the Stewards' "sh-sh." Alan dared not even turn his head to see the cause, till with a final wriggle forward from Nell, her sheep were in the pen, and she came up to lie in the entrance.

Then Alan turned towards Bess, whose excitement and keenness to do something had not allowed her to keep still. Even when the sheep were against the pen she wove about before them, and worried on at them until in exasperation they backed up against the pen mouth, and stood shaking their heads and stamping with their forefeet.

Bess rose to her feet and stood, head thrust out, tail down, but quivering with excitement; tense and alert, staring her sheep in the face. Then inch by inch she came in, picking up one foot, and hesitating before putting it down again

only a few inches ahead. The sheep became more and more uneasy, and stamped the harder, but Bess came almost imperceptibly, but inexorably, on. At last the sheep's nerve broke; they could no longer withstand the power of Bess's eye; and as she advanced, they backed into the pen.

When Bess saw that they were too far in to slip out sideways, her patience gave way, and she

sprang in.

The sheep wheeled to bolt, but were stopped by the back hurdle of the pen. And Bess dropped, pleased and panting, across the mouth.

Many of the crowd, intent on Alan and Nell, had not seen Bess's own private show; but when those who had been watching her began to clap, everyone saw her lying proudly in the pen's mouth; and the cheering was quite beyond the control of the officials.

Bess's performance sold Trout's pup for him, and it was also the cause of the first meeting of Alan Stuart and Beowulf, which, though neither could know it at the time, was to be of the greatest importance to both of them.

CHAPTER V

ALAN STUART

AFTER running his dogs in the double stakes, Alan had still an hour or more before his bus went. He was sitting on a bank watching the running of other dogs, while Bess and Nell lay at his feet, when Leverson came up to him.

Leverson had arrived in the district early that morning; and he had heard of the Bannerdale Trials while he was at breakfast. He had been anxious to see some trials, and he altered his proposed route to take them in. Like everyone else he had been impressed by Bess's work: he saw that Alan was obviously of the same station, and not much older than himself; and he approached him with the idea of learning something about Bess, and also of asking about a few points in the general running, which he had not altogether understood, for he had no experience of sheep or sheepdogs. Alan, who was a sociable soul, was only too glad to discuss the sheepdogs, and he was also glad of the opportunity to learn something of Beowulf, whose magnificent appearance

ALAN STUART

and wise face he had already admired at a distance.

Leverson recounted how he had come by Beowulf, and all that he knew about him. Alan expressed some surprise that he had been given the thoroughly English name of Sandy, which was the one that Leverson used; and he learnt that his real name was Beowulf, but that Leverson had changed it, partly it seemed because he had some suspicion that there was wolf blood in Alsatians.

"I feel sure that is a mistaken idea," Alan said, "because Alsatians were originally, and in fact still largely are on the Continent, used for work among sheep; indeed, I believe that the breed was produced for that work. And I am told that it is well known in Canada, where some at any rate of the sled dogs really have a cross of wolf blood, that any such stain is perfectly fatal to the sheep; for the dogs can never be taught to leave them alone, their one idea being to kill them as quickly as possible. In fact, I think I am right in saying that some Herdwicks from this district were tried in Labrador, but the dogs killed them all, and it is quite hopeless to try and keep sheep where the dogs are. So as Alsatians undoubtedly can be used as sheepdogs, it seems

sufficient proof to me that they cannot possibly have any wolf blood."

"But," Leverson argued, "we sometimes hear in England of Alsatians worrying sheep; in fact one or two people have told me that that was the crab to them. And, anyway, I thought all dogs were supposed to be descended from wolves."

"I don't suppose that dogs are any more nearly related to wolves," Alan said, "than we are to chimpanzees, and I personally never feel any desire to go and live in a tree. As for the sheep worrying, that may be true to a certain extent, but you must remember that there has been some propaganda against Alsatians lately, so that the most is always made in the popular Press of any lapse. For all that, they may be a bit inclined to worry sheep, and I believe the reason for it is this: the English dogs, or many of them, have been bred almost entirely for show, and in the process they have largely lost the sheep instinct, but not entirely, so that the sight and smell of sheep excites them, and they feel that they ought to do something with them, but they don't know quite what. Then, if they see another dog chase, or something starts them off, they may take to worrying. They always tell me that no dog is so likely to kill sheep as one with a bit of sheepdog

in him, for it is the sheep instinct which, if it becomes perverted, leads to worrying.

"I am afraid that mutton on the hoof, especially hill sheep, must be very attractive to all dogs; anyway, they always take the most frightful care up here with their foxhounds and trail-hounds. And even then sometimes an accident will start off the safest of them."

Leverson was still not altogether convinced: for he said, "What made them call Sandy here 'Beowulf'—it sounds a bit wolfy to me, though I don't know what it means—is it German, or what?"

"I don't know what it means," Alan admitted, but I should not let it worry you: Beowulf was a Nordic hero, and I expect the dog was named after him."

"Oh, I never heard of him. What did he do?"

"Well, I am not very much up in the Sagas, I am afraid, but as far as I can remember Beowulf was a Geat; he slew the monster Grendel, who bore God's anger, I remember that, it is such a grand description. Then he fought Grendel's mother, the giantess, beneath the mere. He did a lot more, I expect. But, anyway, I think Beowulf is a goodish name for a dog."

When Alan heard that Leverson had no definite plans for the night, he asked him to stay with him; and the two with their dogs went off on the 'bus together.

On the way home the 'bus was held up for a minute or two by a timber wagon, carrying the trunk of a giant beech tree. The team consisted of six magnificent shire horses, and they were in the act of hauling the timber up a bit of a rise, out of a wood on to the road. There had been a deal of timber taken down that ride, and the gateway was churned up and deep in mud, so that the wagon wheels sank deep.

As the team strained up the final rise on to the road, they were a grand sight; all the horses were in perfect condition, hard and full of muscle; and though they were not distressed or lathering, they were just beginning to sweat, and were hot enough to make their coats shine like satin.

At a cheer from the teamster, every horse threw himself into his collar like a giant glorying in his strength. The leather of their harness creaked and strained, the mud squelched from under the feet of the horses and the slowly turning wheels of the heavy wain. The great muscles on the horses' shoulders and quarters bulged and rippled beneath the skin. And as

with pricked ears and spread nostrils, they threw their weight on to the forehands the long manes tossed and shook.

In a few moments of desperate struggle the tree was up on the hard road and it was all over. But those moments revealed the very height of animal power and effort.

Alan particularly enjoyed the sight, for it was not one often to be seen in that part of the country, where the heavy shire horses were comparatively rare. The heaviest horses to be seen as a rule were Clydesdales, a breed that Alan did not much care for, and many farmers had nothing heavier than fell ponies. Trout had two wonderful fell ponies, which did most of the work on his farm. One was a stallion, then over twenty years old, but still full of vigour and a model of strength and activity. The other was a mare, and almost every spring she had a foal by the old pony; but the stallion was as sensible as could be, and Alan had many a time seen husband and wife pulling together in the plough or hay mower, and never taking the least notice of each other, while the son or daughter of that year was shut up in the stable till his mother's work was done, and they could be turned out together for the night.

Alan and Leverson left the 'bus at Forefoot Cross and walked back to Stonethwaite. On the way they left Bess and Nell at Lower Mirehouse Farm, and Alan told Mrs. Trout how they had run, for Trout had not yet returned from his meeting. Then they went on to the Vicarage.

The Vicarage was rather a nice old house. Like most of the houses and farms about, all the outside walls were whitewashed, and this with the slate roof gave it rather a pleasant appearance. Its proportions too were good, long for its size, and rather low. At the back there were wide double doors leading into the first and top story, and these doors were reached by a ramp, so that a horse and cart could be driven right up to them.

There had been a good reason for this peculiar architecture when the house had been built, for it was the practice to keep the cattle at nights on the top story, where they would be safe from the moss troopers. It seems rather queer that they should have preferred to keep the cattle above, and themselves slept below, but no doubt they thought that it was safer that way; and in those days they were not much troubled by the niceties of hygiene.

All along the Border there are still many relics

of the old moss trooping days: besides a few houses with the byres on the top story, there are farms where the house and buildings are all within a circular wall, and with no windows outside. So the farm closely resembles a fortress, as indeed it was. And Alan, who was vaguely interested in local history, had seen documents requiring certain landowners to keep bloodhounds for the pursuit of the thieves into their mosses.

Another interesting part of the Vicarage was the staircase, which was spiral and built in a sort of turret outside the house itself. The inside of the house was nothing extraordinary except for a rather fine old ceiling in the diningroom. The heavy oak beams of the ceiling were laid criss-cross, and divided the whole into twelve squares. These squares were plastered, and accurately dated if not the whole house, at any rate that room, for in the centre of each square was the Tudor Rose, while around the outside was a pattern of the pomegranates of Aragon.

At the Vicarage door Alan was met by his black cocker spaniel, who was known as "the Peke" because of his turned-up nose and rather prominent eyes, which as a pup had given him something of the look of one of the lion dogs of ancient China.

The Peke was not much to look at according to modern standards: apart from his rather unconventional face, his ears were a deal too short, and set too high on his head; and he was generally rather low and thickset; and, worst of all, inclined to be curly coated. But he was a stunner for work, with a great nose; and no covert could defeat him. Unlike a great many cockers, he was quite easy to manage, and it was Alan's boast that he could stand on his church tower, and work the Peke over the whole of his parish, without missing any game. The experiment had never actually been tried, but that the idea was not entirely ridiculous gives some estimate of the Peke's powers.

Beowulf did not return the Peke's advances, nor those of Mrs. Short, Alan's housekeeper and sole domestic servant. His whole training had made him suspicious and aloof with strangers; and indeed he had not yet come to regard even Leverson as other than a stranger, the more so as Leverson did not call him Beowulf which was the only name he knew, for Sandy meant nothing whatever to him.

The Peke was in the habit of spending the

night in Alan's bedroom, so Beowulf slept on the library sofa.

The next morning after breakfast Leverson and Beowulf set off on their walking tour of the lakes. Alan had the evening before directed Leverson so that he could not fail to find the Brundhome Pass, a way not over-easy to find, but one which was far shorter than the road, and also commanded some magnificent scenery.

"When you pass the height of land," Alan said, "you will see Blae Tarn before you, leave that on the left and follow the beck right down to Lake Southermere, and then bear right; you cannot miss it. The only thing is, don't wander off to your left, or you will be in Hellaw Forest. Old Colonel Stuart would not like you there, for fear that you might disturb the deer, especially at this time of the year when the all too short season is just coming on. You are quite likely to see some deer, anyway: there are usually one or two at this time in the Blae Ghyll which you must pass, but that does not matter as long as you don't go into the forest itself."

"You seem to know the country around here

pretty well," Leverson said.

"Oh yes. I am always knocking about on the fells."

"Don't you find it a bit dull up here by yourself, especially with only a tiny parish?"

Alan laughed.

"Dull? No. There's always something to do. The people up here are grand, the best in the world. I can often go shepherding with Trout, or fox-hunting, on foot of course; and then I can fish and shoot pretty well where I please, as long as I can find game and not interfere with the old Colonel. As a matter of fact, I like the rough parts with less game, as it gives me more chance to use the dogs. The Colonel always lends me a grand brace of setters, Cinders and Smoke, when I want them, and the Peke is a nailer. It is really only for the dogs that I shoot, I would hardly go out if it wasn't for them.

"Then there are the deer: I have permission, and I believe the Colonel really likes me to stalk on the outlying parts when the wind is right, and any disturbed deer will go into the forest. Often I never see any deer, and oftener never get a shot; and I rarely shoot anything but stags going back and very old hinds, which are better out of the way. But I like watching the deer, and indeed all animals and birds. I try to be a bit of an amateur naturalist: this is a great

place for it, and you can always do that at any season.

"I love the hills too. I was born here, in this house as a matter of fact, and I suppose the hills are in my blood. I do quite a bit of climbing and when I was at Cambridge I always went to Switzerland each summer, and once to Norway. So you can see I am never dull. Maybe I don't do much work, and I am afraid the old Bishop wasn't best pleased at my going into this backwater so young, but there has always been a Stuart here, and I told him I would do more good here, where I like and understand the people, than in a town where I do neither. I think it is true to a certain extent too.

"But I am afraid this is all very boring to you. Sorry."

After this confession of faith the conversation rather languished. Alan felt a little awkward, for he was generally rather reserved and shy; but like many shy people, when he started he was inclined to be almost over-frank: and living, as he did, by himself with his intercourse mostly confined to the village folk, it was not often that he could talk with anyone of his own ideas and education. When, as on this occasion, he thought that he had been talking out of his turn,

BEOWULF

he suddenly became shyer than ever. And, as Leverson, who had travelled from London the previous night, was ready to go to bed early, a move in that direction was soon made.

CHAPTER VI

LOST

In the morning when Leverson left the road and started up the fell to the Brundhome Pass, he let Beowulf off the lead. This was the first time that he had done so out of doors, but he thought that by then Beowulf would be sufficiently taken to him and that there was no longer any risk of losing him.

Many dogs, when given their liberty after some months, might have raced madly about, and that was rather what Leverson expected; but Beowulf seemed content to follow quite soberly along. The place was swarming with sheep, but he paid no attention to them other than to turn and watch them as they galloped away.

Leverson passed the height of land, and began to descend towards Blae Tarn. As he came to a deep narrow ghyll, he was surprised to see two three-year-old male deer spring up at no great distance and canter away. Beowulf watched them with evident interest; and Leverson, who

was anxious to see him stretch himself, and confident that he would not have sufficient speed to run up to the deer, lewed him on to them. Beowulf set off once and astonished Leverson by his turn of foot. In fact, as long as the deer continued up the hill, he gained quite noticeably upon them, although they were not really extending themselves; and once they started down the other side they left him far behind. Becoming unsighted Beowulf cast about for the line; and, while doing so, by bad luck he ran almost on top of a little Herdwick shearling, which had been asleep in one of the scrapes that all hill sheep make by much rubbing in the places where the ground has sunk.

The shearling galloped off in a fright; and Beowulf, who was excited by being set on to chase the deer, possibly scarcely realised that it was not a wild animal, because the little grey Herdwicks of the fells are very different in appearance and scent from the large white South country sheep. At any rate he set off after it, overtook it in a moment, and then instinctively went for the throat. He was a very powerful dog, and easily turning the little sheep on to its back, he shook it like a rat. By the time that Leverson arrived on the scene, Beowulf

was beginning to lose interest, and was only half-heartedly mouthing at the already dead sheep.

The position was extremely delicate: Beowulf had done most grievous wrong; but it was not certain that after being set on to the deer, he was quite clear that he had done so. More, he scarcely knew Leverson, and being by nature slow to make friends, he certainly did not recognise him as his master. Leverson had little real experience of dogs, and none of highly strung and trained dogs such as Beowulf. And the state of affairs was beyond him. He rushed up to Beowulf, who was still standing over the dead sheep and, rating him loudly, he set about him with his stick. He may have had some idea that the sheep was still alive, and that if he beat Beowulf off quickly enough, he could save it. At any rate he made the cardinal error of not first tying the dog up; had he done so Beowulf might have appreciated that he was being punished for a fault, a thing of which he had no idea. He had never before been punished with a stick, for it had been a part of his training that he attack on command in spite of the stick, with which the "criminal" might be armed, and which he used most freely. Besides, he did not

understand the scolding: of course he could not know the meaning of Leverson's words, and though his voice certainly sounded angry there was a notable absence of the one word of reproof with which Beowulf was familiar, "Pfui," which he thoroughly understood and which had so invariably been used as a reproof for any fault, that it never occurred to him that he could be scolded with any other.

Leverson, by the use of the stick and the indiscriminate rating, had put himself, from Beowulf's point of view, very much in the position of the "criminal." And Beowulf was considerably puzzled what to do. He was perfectly ready to attack anyone, either on the spoken command, or on the implied command of an attack upon his master, but an attack upon himself was scarcely the same thing. If he had been in a room, or other confined space, he would probably have attacked in self-defence. As it was, he had no reason either to attack, or to stay and be beaten; so after a moment's hesitation he cantered away in the direction whence he had come, when in pursuit of the deer, and disappeared over the ridge.

Beowulf, having now entirely abandoned his new owner, would in the ordinary course of

events have made every effort to get home; for it is from situations such as this that dogs, and other animals, frequently make those odysseys, in spite of great distances and difficulties, by which they reach their old homes. Beowulf, however, unlike almost any dog with a new owner, had no old master nor home whither he might attempt to return. Therefore, while determined to have no more to do with Leverson, he had nothing to do but wander about where he was. Unfortunately, he had little chance of finding a new master, because he was by nature, and still more by training, too shy to go scavenging around the back yards of farms or villages, where someone might have taken him up.

One good look at the sheep satisfied Leverson that it was dead, and he set off in quest of Beowulf, who had stopped beyond the ridge; but as Leverson approached, he retired and kept his distance. Leverson tried threats and cajolery: tried standing and calling him, and walking after him. For an hour he tried everything he could think of while Beowulf if anything only grew the wilder, till finally it blew up misty. In the mist he lost touch with Beowulf altogether, and after some further wandering about he gave

it up.

In his efforts to catch Beowulf he had paid little attention to where he was going, and he was afraid of getting lost and benighted on the fells. He had heard plenty of stories, mostly untrue or exaggerated, of people lost in the mist, and he made off best pace in what he took to be the direction of Southermere. He had no difficulty in finding his way, for by keeping on down the hill, he presently came to a small beck, which he followed down until he came out of the mist, and saw Lake Southermere below him. He walked on to St. John's-in-the-Vale, where he intended to put up at the inn for the night.

The next morning the mists still lay on the high fells. Though Leverson made an effort to find Beowulf, he could not even find the place where he had lost him, the fells in the deceitful mist appearing quite strange to him. After a fruitless search he returned to St. John's-in-the-Vale in the afternoon, only to see, soon after he got back, the mists blow clear from the tops.

That evening while Leverson was in the bar of the inn, a farmer came in who had crossed the Brundhome Pass late in the afternoon after the mists had cleared: he had seen a sheep killed by Beowulf and a little later another one. He

knew of course that both had been killed by a dog; and as a sheep-killer was a very serious thing in a country whose chief industry was sheep, it was naturally the sole topic of conversation for the evening. Each man in turn recalled previous instances of the same trouble; and Leverson heard with horror of two dogs which not many years before had killed no less than eighty sheep in one afternoon. What if Beowulf were to run amok, and he should be held liable for the damage!

Leverson asked what a sheep would be worth, and was told perhaps thirty shillings, though of course it all depended on circumstances. Thirty shillings was less than he had thought, still a hundred and twenty pounds was a considerable sum.

He went to bed in a state of panic, he had no money of his own, and he was terrified of his father who had not been over-enthusiastic, to say the least of it, when he had bought Beowulf. If he was to be landed with a heavy damage bill for sheep, he did not know what would happen.

The next morning he went once more to look for Beowulf, but he could see no sign of him, except two dead sheep, one of which had evidently been killed fairly recently, since midnight anyway, and probably after daylight. Both were badly chewed about the neck, and one of them had apparently been gnawn into beneath the shoulder, in order to get at the heart and lungs; both, however, were already so mangled by the ravens that how much exactly Beowulf had eaten was not clear.

Leverson had no idea how long Beowulf might remain loose. So far he did not appear to have indulged in any wanton killing, but there was no telling when he might begin, or what damage he might do if he started. Besides, for all Leverson could know there might be some unscrupulous farmer who would take the opportunity to pile on the damage. His imagination began to run riot, till he made up his mind that the only thing to do was to fold up his tent and steal quietly away. He supposed that someone would sooner or later shoot Beowulf; and it would not be easy for anyone to come at him for damages, as Beowulf had only a chain chokecollar with no name-plate.

He was vaguely sorry for the dog, but, if he would not allow himself to be caught, he thought he must take the consequences. Besides, now that he had once taken to sheep it seemed

likely that he would have to be destroyed, anyway.

Leverson walked to the nearest railway station and changed his walking tour from Cumberland and Westmorland to Northumberland.

CHAPTER VII

THE WILD DOG OF BRUNDHOME DALE

THE numbers of Beowulf's slain continued to increase steadily. They were all within a radius of a little over a mile; but, in spite of watches being kept, he was for some time only once seen, and then only at a great distance. Poison could not be tried because of the grave risk to the sheepdogs belonging to upwards of a dozen farmers, all of whom from time to time, were at work on the Brundhome fells. And the same applied to traps.

After he had been loose a week or so, and he had killed a sheep nearly every night, things became so serious that determined efforts were made to destroy him. Nearly every night one or more men were out with guns; and early one morning Jem Hobart found him feeding on a sheep which he had just killed. Beowulf instantly made off, and Jem, who was a bit flustered by coming suddenly upon him, missed him clean with the first barrel. And by the time that he had fired the second, Beowulf was too

far away to be much damaged; he did, however, receive a fair quantity of fine pellets in the hind-quarters, with sufficient force to sting him up considerably; and that, coming on top of his first unpleasant experience of firearms, made him take extra good care for the future to keep out of gunshot range of any man.

Two mornings after being fired at by Hobart, Beowulf was flukily harboured in the Buckcastle Crags by Alan Stuart. Alan had reason to believe that there were one or two pine martens inhabiting the crags, and for that reason he was often out early in the hope of seeing something, and learning the habits of these now rare animals. He, like everyone else, had heard of the sheepworrying, and so he kept a look-out, in the hope of getting a chance to put a stop to the nuisance. For that reason he had a rifle with him, but Beowulf was far out of range. However, Alan saw him make his way into a thick patch of junipers and rowans in Buckcastle Crags; and though he waited for some time Beowulf did not come out.

After making sure that Beowulf had lain up for the day, Alan went off to give his information to Trout; and a drive was organised consisting of everyone that could be found. Six guns were

stationed along the crest above the crags: stops were placed at the ends to prevent the dog slipping away on either side; and everyone else climbed up through the crags, in the best order that they could keep, and making as much noise as possible.

Beowulf was soon on his feet and was greeted by a hurricane of shouting and hollas. Three times he was seen for an instant only; and then, after a long disappearance, he suddenly showed up as if by magic, standing on a crag at the very top. He stood on the extreme edge, quick and alert, his ears cocked forward; and, with his head slightly on one side, he was peering down whence he had come to see what all the noise was about. As he stood there silhouetted against the sky, like some statue in granite, he looked rather lovely. And it was to his beauty that he owed his life, because Alan, who was nearest to him, hesitated before he could bring himself to fire. Then, recalled to a sense of duty, he put up his rifle in a hurry.

Beowulf saw the sun glint on the barrel out of the corner of his eye, and he sprang like a flash over the crag. He landed in a juniper bush, recovered his feet with catlike agility, and went charging down through the crags at breakneck speed. He slipped between two beaters, crossed

WILD DOG OF BRUNDHOME DALE

the beck at the bottom, and racing up the opposite

slope, disappeared over the skyline.

Tired with their exertions, the disappointed beaters went sadly home, and it said something for their courtesy, that they refrained from grumbling to Alan over his missed opportunity. Although nothing was said, Alan was none the less contrite that he had missed a chance of killing the sheep-killer, simply because of a certain sentimental affection for dogs generally, and even worse a misplaced admiration for Beowulf's beauty.

Beowulf did not again return to the Buck-castle Crags. All attempts to find his new kennel, and to approach him while he was abroad or feeding on a sheep proved unsuccessful, so recourse was had to the Southermere Foxhounds. These like all the other fell packs, though kennelled in the winter, were put out to walk in the summer; and they had not yet been brought into kennel for the season. The huntsman therefore went round the walks, and collected eight and a half couple into kennel. They were taken to the Clough Farm which was the nearest to the usual scene of Beowulf's depredations. But on the first morning after they were there, a search failed to discover a kill of the previous night.

Very early on the second morning Alan, who was one of the watchers and was assisted by a powerful glass, had his attention attracted by the movements of sheep, and presently spied Beowulf feeding on a kill. Before the pack could be brought up he had left it, and they were laid on to the drag. At first some of the hounds, especially the older ones, were very doubtful; but most hounds are keen enough to run dog if allowed to do so, and the huntsman had especially selected seven couple, which he thought most likely for the job. One or two soon opened, and in a very short time all were running eagerly; and more than a few with unusual dash, and with their hackles up.

There was a first-rate scent, and it was not long before Beowulf was roused. He got up from among a few stones, on a little knoll in the midst of a wide, rather shallow valley; and his kennel had been well chosen, for as long as he lay among the grey stones he was invisible; and yet he commanded practically the whole of the ground in every direction for three-quarters of a mile or more. He jumped up when the hounds were within about half a mile of him, and went off in a leisurely manner. Everyone who had a gun at once dispersed to different vantage

60

WILD DOG OF BRUNDHOME DALE

points, which they hoped he might pass and so give them the chance of a shot.

Avoiding all the guns, probably largely by luck, Beowulf had run a twisting line for perhaps rather under three miles in all, before he came once more under the observation of Alan, who had taken up his position so as to command the deep and narrow Aira Dale. Beowulf was then little more than two hundred yards before the leading hound, and he was as often as not in view. Most fell hounds, even in the season, do not run very level; and now they were in such widely differing states of condition, and some were keener to run dog than others, that they were very much strung out; and Wanderer, the leading hound, was quite thirty yards in front of the next.

Beowulf crossed the Aira Beck, and climbed some three parts of the way up the opposite hill, before he turned down the dale side parallel with the beck. He was soon among some very steep crags, known as the Falcon Crags. He picked his way, with what seemed unnecessary care, along a narrow and precipitous trod, while Wanderer gained rapidly upon him. Presently Alan saw him round a little corner, and stop and lie down facing the hounds. Once he had lain

down he was hardly distinguishable from the grey crags even through the glass. Alan thought that the end had come, and was considerably surprised that he had been run up so soon.

As Wanderer came round the corner on to him, Beowulf rose up almost from beneath his feet, and seized him by the throat. The hound would have been no match for the other in any circumstances, and, taken as he was completely by surprise, he could not even get a grip for his teeth. The struggle was so short, that even before the second hound could come up, Wanderer went spinning over the edge to instant death on the screes below.

Beowulf ran almost to the far end of the crags, and then repeated the manœuvre. This time he was not so successful, and before he could finish with the leading hound a couple more were upon him. However, there was a perceptible hesitation in closing on their part, and Beowulf threw them off, slipped through the crags with extraordinary activity, and got clear. He climbed up a little way, and then turning back, he went through the crags the reverse way at a higher level.

Alan, taking his glass off him for a moment, lost him, and he realised that he must have lain

down a third time. Alan could not again find him, but by keeping his glass on the leading hound he saw exactly what happened. This time Beowulf did not even close with the hound at all, but taking him by surprise, he thrust himself between the hound and the crag face, and shouldered him over the edge. Luckily this fall was not serious, as the hound managed to break his fall half way down on a ledge, and he got off with a severe shaking.

Alan realised that if left alone, Beowulf would work backwards and forwards through the crags, and systematically cut up the whole pack in detail. He was far out of shot, but Alan sent half a dozen bullets after him, and they had the effect of making him leave the crags for good.

Beowulf went right away; he descended the Rigg, crossed the Scarsdale Beck, and threaded his way through the bottom of the Black Crags, above the old Wancheate Farm, deserted now this half a century or more, since the old sheep-stealer Todhunter had died. Skirting the Eagle Crags he ran to the lakeside, and swam across Lake Southermere, thereby finally throwing off his pursuers.

When the pack returned, some to the kennels and some to their walks, they were a couple

short, and of those that returned one limped in with his forearm badly bitten, and one or two more were rather the worse for wear. The use of the hounds was voted altogether too costly, and as they offered but little hope of success, they were not tried again.

Those farmers who had suffered from Beowulf; hoped that the hunt might at least have made him shift his quarters, and that he would give someone else's sheep his attention for a while, but within two days he was back again on his

old ground.

Alan had an idea that as Beowulf had been roused from his kennel on the knoll, not by a man but only by the hounds, he might not have abandoned it; and he took his rifle and glass to a hill overlooking it, for a spy. He did not go until midday, because he believed that Beowulf would then be most likely to be there and asleep. But though he spied the stones most carefully, he could not pick him out. However, there were a dozen grey stones, any one of which might have been Beowulf curled up asleep; and Alan determined to stalk the knoll as carefully as though he were certain that Beowulf was there. He knew that although he could not see Beowulf, if he was there and awake he would

WILD DOG OF BRUNDHOME DALE

probably be able to see him, and so he must if possible keep out of sight, and anyway keep the wind.

He started down a shallow depression, which he hoped would bring him fairly well in; but as so often happens when stalking over strange ground, he was deceived. He had to go right back, make a wide détour to avoid the wind, and come in down a gutter which he had at first thought less likely. He had to pass through sheep, which he was at pains to move as quietly as possible. And he was just thinking that he was getting on famously, when, as he passed on hands and knees over a boggy spot, up got a snipe, which went zig-zagging away upwind with its little thin "scape-scape" of alarm. Alan abused the miserable fowl with most unclerical language, and he was not inclined to change his opinion when he saw Beowulf's head shoot up from among the stones.

Beowulf sat right up on his haunches, as though he were begging, and peered about him. He was within a long shot; but Alan was in view, and he knew that the instant that he moved to get his rifle up he would be seen, and he was too far off for a running shot. For quite a minute Beowulf remained sitting up, while Alan froze.

BEOWULF

The dog could evidently see the sheep which Alan had moved, and was uneasy, for he finally trotted out at right angles across Alan's front. He had gone perhaps a hundred and twenty yards, when he stopped with his head turned in Alan's direction, testing the wind, some stain in which he had felt. He looked very much like a pointer that has winded game, and in a moment getting the taint again, he caught sight of Alan, turned, and galloped away. Nor did he lie up among those stones again.

CHAPTER VIII

CAPTURE

ALAN now spent a good deal of time in trying to destroy Beowulf. The killing of a sheep nearly every night was a serious thing to the farmers affected; and Alan felt that as he had more time and opportunity than almost anyone else, it was up to him to do something about it, especially as it was he who had ruined the carefully planned drive of the Buckcastle Crags. He also had an idea since seeing the wild dog so clearly on the top of the crags, that it was the Alsatian which he had seen at Bannerdale Trials. And, though he kept that idea to himself, he was inclined to blame himself for introducing the animal into the district, as he had first invited his owner to Stonethwaite, and had then directed him over the Brundhome Pass.

Although it was from this idea of responsibility that Alan began his serious pursuit of Beowulf, he soon quite entered into the spirit of the thing. He presently ceased to regard Beowulf as a dog at all, but as some opponent particularly worthy

67

of his skill. It was a sort of super deer-stalking: he liked better than almost anything else pitting his intelligence and woodcraft against the wary red deer when every swell in the ground, and flaw in the wind had to be studied, as well as the movements of every living thing within the deer's ken. He always felt somehow, when he had successfully got in, that the shot at the rather lovely and unsuspecting deer was something of a pity, and partly for that reason, and partly out of consideration for Colonel Stuart, he mostly confined his rifle to deer that were better out of the forest. With Beowulf he had no such qualms, but was out to abate a very real nuisance as quickly as he could.

For some time after the unsuccessful stalk among the stones, Alan was unable to get near him at all, nor find where he lay up in the day-time. From time to time, in the very early morning, he caught distant glimpses of him, but that was the best that he could do. Alan was by no means the only one out for the wild dog's blood, but none of the others were any more fortunate.

Often enough Alan slept out on the hills so as to be on the ground very early in the morning, which was the most likely time to see anything. The nights were inclined to be a bit sharp, but summer still lingered on, and they were by no means bad. On one such morning Alan awoke to find that there was a thick mist on the high fells; yet there was quite a strong breeze, and he expected it to blow clear at any moment. So he waited rolled up in his blanket long after it was light.

At about eight o'clock, when it was still as thick as ever, Alan decided that it was of no use to wait any longer, as Beowulf should be already laid up for the day, and would give no chance that morning. He threw his blanket over his shoulder and set off home, but after walking a little way he loaded his rifle; on the principle that Beowulf was just as likely to turn up when least expected as at any other time.

He was descending the Great Rigg by a narrow trod, with the intention of returning to Stone-thwaite by the disused track from Wancheate, along the Scarsdale Beck, when he noticed the first signs of the mist breaking. He had watched the clouds roll away from the high fells a thousand times, but he never tired of watching the glorious countryside appear suddenly through the rents, where the mantle of the mist was riven. He sat down on a rock, with the rifle across his knees

and watched the flashing water of the Scarsdale Beck appear at his feet, then the wide sheet of Lake Southermere, then bit by bit the rugged grandeur of the Black Crags on the fellside opposite. Here and there a patch of brilliant blue appeared, and at last the sun came through to set the whole landscape aglow.

Alan remained watching and quite still till his attention was attracted by a movement among the crags on his right: there not a hundred yards away, and quite unsuspecting of his danger, was Beowulf quietly walking towards him. Alan slipped up the safety catch and resting his elbows on his knees, took careful aim. Beowulf saw the movement, and in the instant that he stood at gaze, Alan pressed the trigger. The bullet spanged against the rock face beside Beowulf's head, broke off a chip of stone, and went whining away into space.

As the bullet struck, Beowulf instinctively sprang away, to fall fifty feet before he lit on his Then he went rolling and bumping down back. the crags and screes about another hundred feet. When at last he stopped falling, he tried repeatedly to get to his feet, but he was unable to stand for any time.

Alan raised his rifle to finish his work, but was

unable to fire: now that Beowulf was helpless he had ceased to be the curse of the shepherds, but had become once more simply a dog, and the idea of killing him correspondingly revolting. Besides, Alan had a secret admiration for any dog that could continue to live, not only without the help, but even in spite of man. He made his way down, as quickly as the nature of the ground would allow, to where Beowulf was still unsuccessfully endeavouring to make his legs obey his will. Beowulf got to his feet again and again, but he could only make a few yards before falling over, and his progress, half running and half dragging, was so slow that Alan easily came up with him.

Finding that flight was hopeless, Beowulf turned round and waited in a sitting position. Alan at once rendered him completely helpless by throwing the blanket over his head. Then keeping his head covered, he made a quick examination of his limbs, but he was unable to find any fracture. Now that he was close to him Alan easily verified the belief, which he had long held, that the sheep-killer was indeed the Alsatian that he had seen at the Bannerdale Trials, and that had spent the following night on his own library sofa. He had forgotten the

owner's name, and what he had called the dog, but he remembered that his original name had been Beowulf, for there had been a discussion as to the origin and meaning of it, and he thought that Beowulf was good enough for him.

He found himself quite unable to kill the dog. And he made up his mind to take him home, and see what would come of it; for he considered that the previous owner had forfeited all rights by abandoning him, and anyway he was not likely to come forward and claim him and also the liability for the worried sheep. He fastened his rifle to his belt by the trigger guard, and, making sure that the rug was securely about Beowulf's head, he picked him up by the fore and hind legs, and put him across his shoulders. Beowulf was no light weight and Alan would gladly have rested on his way home, but any movement was met by a low whimper and evidently caused the dog considerable pain, so he did it in one stretch.

It was not necessary to go through the village street to get to the Vicarage; and Alan was glad to meet no one, because he was aware that the almost unanimous verdict would be for Beowulf's instant execution.

He put Beowulf down on the library sofa and

removed the rug, keeping one hand on his neck to prevent him from rising, till he should have got over his probable fright. He told Mrs. Short to send the man-of-all-work into the village for the doctor, and himself remained talking to Beowulf, calling him by name, rubbing his ears, and generally trying to persuade him that he was once more a domestic animal.

He had no hesitation in sending for Doctor Sarum to attend to a dog, for the nearest vet. was seven miles away and there was no telephone in Stonethwaite. And even if the vet. had been available he would still probably have sent for Sarum, who was a particular friend of his, and Alan spent many an evening with him and his young wife, in their house down the street.

In less than a quarter of an hour Sarum was shown in by Mrs. Short

"Well, Alan. What is up with you now?"

"It's all right, Dick, it's not me, but I want you to have a look at this dog. I fancy he has hurt his back, for he fell over some crags."

"Well, of all the cheek! A high-class specialist like me to look at a dog. And by Jiminy!

isn't it the sheep-killer?"

"Yes, poor devil."

"But I say, do you really want me to patch

him up? You are not going to try and keep him, are you?"

"Why of course I am," Alan said.

"But what will all the people say? Won't there be a frightful uproar? Of course, it's nothing to do with me, and I will do anything I can for you, Alan, as you know. But wouldn't it be the best thing if I put him to sleep quietly now? You know what the people are around here, about any sort of sheep trouble."

"I know all that, but since I have to put up with the responsibilities of my cloth, mothers' meetings and the like, I am now going to take advantage of the privileges. 'It is better to save than to slay'; any good parson will tell you that.

So now you have to look at him."

"Right you are, then," the doctor agreed.

Alan once more approached Beowulf, who showed no resentment, only a little nervousness, but he muzzled him before Sarum began his examination for fear that he might bite if he were hurt. Sarum went over him carefully and reported no broken bones, but the muscles of the back and pelvis were so badly bruised that he would not guarantee a complete recovery, though he had hopes. Alan was by this time far keener to keep Beowulf than ever he had been

to destroy him; and he nursed him with the utmost care, poulticing and rubbing him with a gentleness which no woman could have bettered.

At first Beowulf stiffened up so much, that he could not move his hindquarters at all, and it was a fortnight before he could stand. Even after that his progress was still very slow, so that it was two months before he could get about fairly well, and nearly six before he regained his full powers, which he then did entirely. His lameness was in one way a blessing, for it gave Alan a wonderful opportunity to get his confidence while he was still helpless. Alan made the most of his chances, and having something of a way with dogs, and that sort of even temper which most dogs admire, it was not long before Beowulf looked most eagerly for his coming, and was not happy save in his presence.

CHAPTER IX

THE BLACK CATTLE

AT first Beowulf was very tottery on his legs. He would walk a little way and then sit down, and look round at his quarters, and then up at Alan in the most comical way, as if he were asking for some explanation of his weakness. As he got better he accompanied Alan for short walks, at first only about the garden and Vicarage grounds, and then farther afield.

There can be no doubt that there was a very real prejudice against the dog amongst the village people: they thought, not altogether unnaturally, that it was not safe to keep a dog about the place, which had done so much damage among the sheep, and which, for all that they knew to the contrary, might break out once again with returning health. However, Alan was so very popular with everyone, and Beowulf's behaviour was apparently so faultless, that no unpleasantness actually took place.

After a while Alan took Beowulf with him when visiting the village people. The first time

that he went into a cottage, when he had Beowulf with him, he tied him up outside, at the same time telling him to "stay there." When he came out after a little while, he found Beowulf lying quietly, where he had been left, but with the leash by which he had been tied, neatly bitten through. Beowulf though trained to the command "Platz" had perfectly understood what Alan had meant, and he had considered the additional leash an insult, so to show that he could be trusted, and quite possibly as a sop to his injured pride, he had bitten it through.

When Alan had the Peke in similar circumstances he was in the habit of leaving his hat, or stick, or some thing with him, because the Peke, if left over long by himself, was inclined to think that Alan had forgotten him, and then he would come in search of him; while the hat or stick gave him confidence that his master would indeed return for him. Alan tried this dodge with Beowulf, but it was not a success, because Beowulf believed that the object was left for him to guard. If he was left near a cottage door, it sometimes became impossible for the owner to go in or out, as Beowulf seemed to imagine that the man was out to steal the thing which he thought that he was left to guard. He never

actually bit anyone, possibly because he looked so nasty in these circumstances that he was given a wide berth. But there was always the chance that there might be an accident, especially if some child were to try to play with him.

Alan soon found that it was quite unnecessary to leave anything with Beowulf, because he would stop indefinitely to the command "Stay there" and the Peke would stay too, as long as Beowulf was there to give him confidence. When Beowulf was left with nothing to guard, though no one could induce him to move an inch, or even to stand up, yet he was perfectly sweet-tempered, and he allowed children to come and pat him with the greatest good-will. It was only when on guard that he considered it necessary to show his teeth to intruders.

It was not until the following June that Beowulf was finally able to remove the prejudice which still lingered against him because of the sheep. It happened that Alan, who was a keen naturalist, had been unable to locate a merlin's nest. The merlins breed on the ground among the heather, and though Alan had from time to time known parts of the fells which were frequented by the old birds, he had not been able to find the nest itself. He was a great admirer of these gallant

THE BLACK CATTLE

little falcons, scarcely larger than a missel thrush, and he was anxious to have reliable evidence of the size and strength of the birds on which they preyed. So when the postman reported having found a nest, Alan took the first opportunity to go and see it.

The postman, Bell, was rather a character: he was not a very conscientious postman, and it was pretty generally believed, that if he had a single letter for an outlying farm, he was not above holding it over till the next day, on the chance that there might be another one, so that he could make one journey instead of two. And he was also said to confine all printed circulars to the beck. He was the most arrant poacher, and it was his practice while on his rounds to observe carefully the presence and habits of any game so that he could return at night, and net or otherwise take them with the least possible trouble.

Bell was the owner of two wonderful dogs; one was a setter, pure white except for a few black and grey ticks; and to anyone, who was privileged to see him run, it was a grand sight to see this dog work a field by moonlight. He went a real good gallop with his head high, and with a great range; and he was dead sure

on point, so that he would change from a stretching gallop to a carven statue in an instant. His light colour showed up by night; indeed it had been for his colour that he had been chosen out of the litter; and he had a lovely style when setting, so that to see him standing tense on point, his light coat lit up by the moon and clearly etched against the black shadows was a thing not easily to be forgotten.

When the dog set, Bell quietly headed him, and worked up to him with the net, in the use of which he was a master.

The other of Bell's assistants was a dark brindled lurcher, a cross between a greyhound dog and a first-rate collie bitch, and he combined to an extraordinary degree the speed and dash of his father, and the cleverness and handiness of his mother.

Bell well knew the habit of the hares to lie up on the fells in the daytime, and then to come down into the fields in the evening to feed; and he also knew every gate and gap in the fell wall by which they entered, or left the fields at night. He would walk quickly along the fell wall till he reached a part which he knew that the hares frequented; then he would bid Spider, the lurcher, lie down, and go on netting all the gates

and smeuses in the fell wall for a little distance. When this was finished a low whistle was the signal for Spider to do his share.

Spider would work the fields from the side farthest from the fell wall, and using the shepherding instincts of his mother, drive the hares into the nets. As long as the hares made for the fell, he did not trouble himself, but if one broke back past him, he would endeavour to catch it himself, and in this he was as often as not successful, for he ran very cunning, knew most of the smeuses for which the hares would make, and was very clever at picking up. So, though slower than a good greyhound, he was more likely to catch a hare single-handed than are many a brace of fair greyhounds that run straight, and follow the hare through each turn.

It was no uncommon thing for Spider to drive a brace of hares into the nets, and then presently turn up with a hare in his mouth. And sometimes even, he would go back to fetch another one, which he had killed, but had had to drop while he coursed a second hare.

Bell was also a most noted water poacher. He had been born some miles from Stonethwaite, nearer the sea, in a village where every second man was said to be a salmon poacher. He had

learnt, when quite a boy, to swim nearly as well as that other skilful poacher, the otter. If he was disturbed at his night work, he could swim under water to the far end of the pool, and then his head would come up like an otter's under a bush on the far bank; there he would lie, if necessary, or slip quietly out.

He was almost impervious to cold. On one occasion he had noticed a particularly large old cock salmon lying near the edge of a big pool. And he went with a companion armed with a spear and torch to take him. At the first try Bell, who was using the spear, missed; so they retired to a nearby hogghouse to give the salmon time to settle down, and return to his old spot. Bell had been up to his waist in the icy water: it was a cold autumn night, and while he was sitting in the hogghouse, his nether garments froze stiff. So much was this the case, that he had some difficulty in straightening his trouser legs when he tried to get up. However, he knocked the ice off, went back to the beck, and speared his salmon.

Alan held no brief for poaching, but he could not but admire Bell's toughness, his skill and woodcraft, and his scorn of foul weather and of the hardships which it entailed. Besides, he was a cheerful sinner and a most charming companion for any outdoor occupation. This general friendliness often served him in good stead: once he was caught killing a salmon with that effective but illegal instrument, the click-hook. The salmon was confiscated as evidence, with the click-hook still firmly embedded in the shoulder.

At the court next week in Harwick, Bell was summoned before the magistrates, and duly appeared. The salmon was fetched from the fishmonger's, where it had lain in the ice-box till it was required; but when it was produced, there was no sign of any click-hook, though there was a beautiful fly in the corner of its mouth. Exactly how, and by whom, the substitution had been made was never known, but the unfortunate prosecution fell with a flop.

On a few rare occasions Bell would kill a deer. He never went into the forest for the purpose: the difficulties of getting the carcase off the ground unseen were too great. Besides, he preferred letting the deer come to him rather than

going himself in search of the deer.

He was only too well aware of the habit of the deer to come down into the fields in the winter at night. He would find a field which they frequented, and some gap in a wall, which they would be likely to jump on their return to the fells. Then at night when the deer were in the field, he came quietly and wired the gap. Spider would be sent around, and in a minute or two if all went well, Bell would hear the sounds of the startled galloping deer approaching his gap. The hinds would always be leading, even if there were any stags amongst them, and the first hind jumped into the wire and broke her neck, for Bell was no bungler and could set a wire to do the job quickly and quietly.

This manœuvre could only be managed in certain spots, and then only if the wind were right. Even with the conditions favourable and all Bell's skill, it was by no means always successful; but if it was, the hind was cut up, and disposed of among Bell's friends and patrons, before the first glimmer of dawn.

Largely responsible for the success of Bell's poaching activities, and further increased by them, was his great knowledge of wild life. And, as he liked Alan and knew that he was interested in such things, he was always ready to report anything unusual that he had seen.

The merlin's nest was on the slopes above Ridderdale, and their way took them along the old pack-horse road from Stonethwaite. This road

THE BLACK CATTLE

was far older than the present roads, and had been at one time the only road in the district. But it had been long disused for anything except a footpath, and was quite unsuitable to wheel traffic; though sometimes it was used by a rash youth out to try his new motor-cycle. For a mile or more the track led parallel, though at some little distance from the wire fence, which divided the Stonethwaite and Ridderdale commons. Most of the fells are quite unfenced, and the parish boundaries are marked by a few stones, or more commonly a small beck, perhaps only two or three feet wide, and sometimes simply by an imaginary line between two landmarks.

Stonethwaite was an exception, and the land-graves had erected the fence some twenty years before. It was a formidable obstacle, some five feet high of tightly strained wire, for nothing less was of any use against the fell sheep, who can jump an extraordinary height, and force their way through a seemingly impassable place. In fact, Trout had had a Herdwick ewe, which with her lamb was for ever forcing her way into his mowing fields and crops, till in desperation he put her on the far side of the Ridderdale fence. Yet she had even forced her way through the wires of that, and was back in the oats the same

evening. On Alan mentioning this, Bell told how he had once seen a ewe with twin lambs swim Southermere Lake, actually watching them set off on the near side and land safely on the opposite shore; though on another occasion when he saw one try to do the same thing she was less successful. She was nearly half-way across, then she had appeared to lose her head; she spun round several times, and finally sank.

On the Ridderdale common, on the side of the fence farthest from the track, Alan and Bell could see some twenty black cattle. These rough Galloway cattle vary very much in their tempers, possibly according to what strains they spring from. Some are as kind and sweet-tempered as any short-horn, while others are really wicked; and then they are particularly dangerous, because an apparently mild-eyed little cow does not command the caution and respect which are usually ceded to a bull; and yet she is really the more to be feared because of her greater quickness and the fact that she does not rush straight and rather blindly as a bull does.

Alan and Beowulf were to learn something of these black cattle before night.

Bell pointed out the merlin's nest and went on his way, while Alan made his observations. There were three young ones in the nest, of that age at which the brown feathers have mostly replaced the white down of babyhood. Alan found the remains of many birds, both in the nest, and about two or three stones, where the old birds were in habit of plucking their prey before feeding the young ones. The majority of the feathers had belonged to pippits, larks, wheat ears and such small fry, but there were a few also from blackbirds, starlings, and even snipe and an occasional young grouse, though the last must have been very young indeed.

While Alan was examining the nest and its surroundings one, and then both, of the old birds flew round him, screaming their little shrill "Kek-kek-kek." And later when he had retired to a distance, and lain down to watch them, he saw them combine to drive away a great clumsy, slow-flying buzzard, which had approached too close to their domain. They attacked the buzzard, though many times their size, with the greatest fury, and he retired as quickly as possible.

On his way home Alan disturbed a snipe, which went away with that peculiar rush, which all close-sitting ground birds make, when disturbed suddenly from their nests. The snipe made no attempt to sham a broken wing, as many ground birds will, especially before a dog; and a short search disclosed the four pointed eggs, carefully arranged points inwards.

As he approached the spot where he had seen the black cattle, Alan noticed three school-children picking wild flowers on the Ridderdale side of the fence, and at some little distance from the cattle. He saw that several of the cows had calves, and he turned out of his way to warn the children not to approach too close. But before he could reach the fence, one of the little cows had detached herself from the herd, at first at a trot only, but the trot became a gallop, and finally she came charging down on the children, who all too late started to run for safety.

Alan was much too far away to be of any use, but he bethought him of Beowulf, and running on, he pointed to the charging cow, saying:

"Attack, Beowulf, attack!"

Beowulf by this time was so far in sympathy with his master, that he needed no German words of command, and he set off at once at his long, far-striding gallop. He came down to the five-foot wire fence at racing pace, and without checking, stood far back and flew it in his stroke. Then a really desperate race took place: the

children were running to meet Beowulf; but compared to the pace of Beowulf, and of the cow, their speed was negligible. Beowulf was travelling a good deal faster than the cow, but he had a correspondingly farther distance to run, so that the two converged upon the terrified children from nearly opposite directions, and the matter hung so equally in the balance, that until the last moment Alan could not tell which would win.

Probably the distance, which the children covered in running away from the infuriated cow towards Beowulf, little though it was, just made the difference.

Beowulf raced past them, swerving ever so slightly to avoid them, and a moment later sprang at the charging cow. He pinned her by the nose, and such was the force of the meeting that the cow turned a complete somersault; and as Beowulf's head was checked suddenly by his hold on the cow, his tail and hindquarters flew up and round like a whip; his hold was broken, and he went flying through the air to fall heavily on his side many feet from his opponent. He was up a second before the cow, and in time to avoid a determined rush.

Beowulf understood that he was to keep the

cow from the children, and now that he had her undivided attention, there was no further need for him to attack; indeed he had his time cut out to avoid her furious rushes, for she turned after each charge with great quickness and in fact chased him all over the ground.

Alan was not long in helping the children through the fence; and he then called to Beowulf, who came streaking up to him with the cow at his heels; and he only finally got rid of her by jumping back over the fence.

When the account of this exploit got about, it definitely put a stop to any prejudice still remaining against Beowulf, for no one could now deny that he had well redeemed any sheep that he might have killed during his outlawry.

CHAPTER X

THE PEKE AND BEOWULF AT WORK

As the autumn came on Alan did a good deal of shooting. The sort of shooting which he enjoyed most was a long walk with the Peke, with probably only a small bag to show at the end of it, but everything in that bag painstakingly

hunted out, and flushed by the Peke.

One day he went out with the Peke and Beowulf, intending to visit a retired farmer and his wife, who lived at the extreme edge of the parish, and hoping to shoot his way out and They started down the swampy course of a little beck, where the Peke flushed four snipe, only one of which was bagged, because they were walking up-wind, and the snipe going straight away were very different from those flushed down-wind, when they would have turned into the wind and given a chance on the turn. Alan knew this perfectly well, but he had scarcely time to work round and back down-wind, if he was to get to the farm; and though he might have had a chance to shoot this bit of ground

on the way back, that was doubtful because none knew better than himself the slow dawdling conversation of the country people. Besides, he preferred to give the Peke a good chance with the wind and himself a bad one, than vice versa, for the Peke was not much better down-wind than Alan was up. The snipe fell at some distance into some thick rushes where the Peke could not find it, and he was very jealous when Beowulf wiped his eye: Alan was rather surprised for he had never seriously considered Beowulf as a retriever of game.

Leaving the beck they tried a thick patch of brambles and hazels where the Peke spoke eagerly to some line. Presently a woodcock rose with its queer owl-like flight. The Peke came out to the shot and retrieved it, but returned immediately to the brambles, and again picked up the line which he had been hunting. He hunted the whole length of the brambles, and finally pushed up an old cock pheasant, which, rising out of shot, flew back to the far end of the brambles. The Peke marked his line of flight, and racing back, was presently on his line once more. The hunt worked up the brambles again with enough cry for a whole pack of hounds.

The pheasant ran out, and lay down in the

THE PEKE AND BEOWULF AT WORK

ditch, whence the Peke almost pushed him up with his nose. As he rose and flew off towards some fresh covert, the Peke awaited the shot with the most breathless excitement, and it must be confessed, that on seeing his bird fall, he did not await the order to go out and retrieve.

The old cock, being only winged, ran like a racehorse; and it took the little Peke's short legs some time to come up with him, and when he did so the cock was too big and strong for him to carry. Again and again he picked up his bird, and as often the pheasant broke away, till finally the Peke took him by the neck, where, though he was too soft-mouthed to kill him, he had him safe enough. The pheasant, being dragged along by the neck, used his legs to save himself, and presently getting them underneath him he was able to run; so that the Peke finally appeared trotting, with the pheasant, whose neck was in his mouth, running alongside for all he was worth, and a most comical sight they presented.

Although the pheasant was the last addition to the bag, there was one other interesting piece of hunting. The Peke got on to the line of an old buck rabbit in a very big double hedge: a stoat had been working the burries in the hedge

and the rabbit was afraid to go to ground. So he kept up and down the hedge, running on a little way, stopping to listen, then perhaps making a short detour into the field, and returning to the hedge once more, while all the time the Peke hunted excitedly on the line. As often as not both dog and rabbit were in Alan's sight, though the rabbit had seen neither him nor Beowulf, who was lying motionless at his feet. So interesting was the performance of both, that Alan let many opportunities of a shot slip by, till finally the rabbit broke right away to a distant burry and made good his escape, much to the Peke's disgust.

The Peke excelled in this sort of hunting, and he had once hunted a winged duck up and down, across and around a small tarn for the best part of half an hour before bringing it to hand. The duck dived and swam under water like an otter, and indeed the whole hunt closely resembled an otter hunt, and was no whit less exciting. As in the case of an otter, when the duck swam under water, a small chain of tiny bubbles rose to the surface to mark its course. When tired of swimming, it hid and dodged about most cunningly in the sieves on the edges of the tarn; and it was only when it became too blown to dive for

THE PEKE AND BEOWULF AT WORK

long, that the Peke, who had stuck to it throughout, caught and retrieved it, to Alan's great satisfaction, not only in the Peke's work, but because he hated leaving any wounded bird to linger on.

The farmer whom Alan was going to visit, Stowell by name, had a big black cross-bred dog, probably with some old-fashioned flat-coat retriever blood in him, which he had come by in a rather curious way. At one time Stowell had had quite a little money in the place; and some ruffian, getting to hear of this, and knowing that it was a most out-of-the-way spot, had determined to rob him.

The would-be thief with the black cross-bred dog, which then belonged to him, called at the farm during the day, and he made some excuse to leave the dog there. Stowell and his wife, who were good-natured and unsuspecting people, readily agreed. That night the dog was left loose in the kitchen, and his owner attempted to break in through the window. He thoroughly expected that he had in his dog an ally within the house in case of need; and it was for that reason that he had left him, for the dog was a medium savage creature, that did not require much incitement to attack anyone. But the dog,

on seeing his master come in through the window, attacked him furiously, and with such good effect that he was forced to retire, considerably the worse for wear, before ever Stowell, who was aroused by the uproar of the dog's growls and snarls, and the man's efforts to quieten him, had time to get downstairs, and see what was to do.

The action of the dog was a plain fact admitting of no doubt, but Alan often wondered what caused him to attack his own master, who had left him only that day. It is possible that he did not recognise him in the dark at all, but against that dogs rely so much more on their noses than their eyes at any time, that the darkness ought not to have made any very great difference. He may have acted on the instinct, common to most dogs, to resent anything in the nature of stealth; or he may have had some idea that, when his master left him at the farm, it became his duty to protect it and its inmates.

Whatever the reason, the thief was singularly hoist with his own petard, and as he never had the effrontery to return and claim his dog, Stowell and his wife gladly and gratefully adopted him.

On this afternoon as always, the Stowells were unfeignedly pleased to see Alan, and their pleasure

THE PEKE AND BEOWULF AT WORK

was in no way dependent on the fact that he had brought them a little game.

There was no shooting on the way back, for it was getting dark by the time that he left, and any hunting was confined to the wild creatures and Stowell's poaching tom-cat, which Alan saw slip across his path with a rabbit in his mouth.

Although the night was a dark one, and most of his road lay over the fells, Alan knew the country so well that he was never in the least danger of losing his way.

Alan was inclined to ascribe to luck rather than skill Beowulf's retrieving of the snipe, which the Peke had been unable to find; but soon after he had proof that he was mistaken in this. He was invited by the squire, old Colonel Stuart, to shoot pheasants, and as all the birds would be driven he did not take the Peke, who could be of little use and might, from his extreme excitement in the presence of game, become a nuisance. He took Beowulf, not with the idea that he would be of any use, but from a desire to have him with him, and in the certainty that whatever happened, he was so obedient that he would never be in the way.

That Beowulf had some ability as a retriever had long been evident, but Alan had never given him much of a chance to prove it on game; partly because he thought that it was the Peke's right, as the Peke certainly did himself, and he did not like to disappoint the eager little beggar; and partly because Beowulf's style was so different from that of the usual gun dog, that Alan thought that he might not be suited to game.

In some respects Beowulf far excelled the Peke; for instance, if Alan dropped anything when out for a walk, he could send Beowulf back a long time after; and Beowulf, without knowing what was lost, would hunt the back line till he came on something of Alan's; or, if it was a friend with Alan, who had dropped the object, Alan would give the friend's scent to Beowulf before sending him back, and he would bring the first thing bearing that scent which he came to.

Beowulf, when hunting a line, was unlike any hound, or retriever type of dog, in his style; and unless one knew him pretty well, or at any rate the Alsatian style of tracking, it was not easy to tell just when he was on the line, and when casting for it, because not only did he run quite mute, but he never feathered or acknowledged a strike in any way, nor as a rule did he alter his pace; but he would hunt at the same speed that he had been casting, usually a fast trot

THE PEKE AND BEOWULF AT WORK though of course varying with the scenting conditions.

Though his style was not very taking, and rather puzzling to anyone used only to hounds, it was none the less effective. And though he appeared to lack the joyful bustle of hounds, retrievers, and spaniels, he was most persevering. He also had the great advantage of being extraordinarily easy to lift or cast, and very cheerful about it. In fact, he was very easy to move generally, even at a great distance, for he was most attentive to a whistle, and he would look back, and then cast himself whichever way Alan waved or otherwise indicated.

A little before lunch at Colonel Stuart's shoot, they shot a very famous pheasant drive—a wood of scrub oak overhanging a steep and narrow valley. The guns stood in the bottom of the valley while the birds came over very high from one side of the valley to the other. Owing to the nature of the ground, any wind that there might be, blew straight up or down the valley, never across it; and, if as was usual in the late autumn, there was any power in the wind, it gave the pheasants, coming high and fast as they were, a decided swerve, which made them very difficult.

Indeed so difficult were the birds that Alan refrained from shooting the drive at all. He was perfectly aware of his limitations as a shot; and as any wounded birds landed high up on the bracken-covered hillside behind the guns, they were not easy to pick up, even with good dogs. Largely for that reason Colonel Stuart asked only first-rate shots, and Alan knew that he was asked only out of courtesy and good nature.

Although he did not shoot, he thoroughly enjoyed standing by and watching the cracks at work; for it was a fine sight to see a high, fast, swerving bird killed stone dead in the air. As he watched, Beowulf sat at his feet, interestedly watching the falling birds. Presently one near Alan was hit and volplaned on to the hillside behind; he turned to mark it, and Beowulf did the same. Alan saw that Beowulf had marked it, and that the bird was only too likely to run, so he gave Beowulf the command to fetch it at once, thinking that it would save a deal of trouble if he could do so, while he still remembered where it fell.

Beowulf galloped away up the hill, but he thought that he was high enough, before in fact he was; and he began hunting considerably

THE PEKE AND BEOWULF AT WORK

below where the cock had fallen. Alan whistled, and as Beowulf looked up, he called "Farther back!" with a wave of his arm, which the dog could easily see and understand. Beowulf after a minute hit off the line, but the pheasant had already run some distance, and was not to be easily taken. The dog hunted out the line systematically through the bracken, and from time to time Alan could see the wounded bird cross an open patch, so that he knew that Beowulf was still on the line of his right game.

It was five or ten minutes before Beowulf ran up the pheasant, which repeatedly doubled and twisted; and throughout that time he never once left the blood scent for any other, although the ground was thoroughly stained by game of

the ground was thoroughly stained by game of all sorts. It must be admitted that on catching the pheasant, the first thing that Beowulf did was to kill it, before he retrieved it; but in spite of this blot on his escutcheon, Alan was delighted with the performance, for staunchness to the blood scent was a characteristic which he had long been anxious to obtain for work on

deer.

The colonel had a brace of cross-bred collie trackers for use in the forest, but they were rather moderate animals, and fell far behind the

class of dog which had previously been in use on Hellaw. Alan's imagination had ever been fired by an extensive range of paintings of dogs, which hung in the smoking-room at the Manor. There were some perfectly magnificent examples of the old pure deerhounds which had at one time been in use. Bran, Sword, Spear, and several others, some of which had, single-handed, coursed and killed hill stags more than four times their weight.

This strain had unfortunately long since died out, as had most of the pure strains in the highlands of Scotland. Each strain, the members of which were never very numerous, had been extensively inbred, partly no doubt from conservatism, and partly also from the difficulty of intercourse in the Highlands a hundred or more vears ago. This inbreeding to the very best tried individuals produced a breed of dogs the equal of which for speed, power, endurance, courage and brains, has probably never been equalled and I fear will never be again. But the inbreeding also begot sterility so that the breed gradually dwindled and died out, or was crossed with collies or foxhounds. Many of these crosses were first rate for wounded deer, and some were even successful in bringing cold

THE PEKE AND BEOWULF AT WORK

stags to bay; but they lacked the terrific dash necessary for coursing deer and pulling them down in the open, and that branch of the sport died out with the old dogs.

Alan never aspired to having such a dog, nor would coursing have been possible for him in the squire's forest with the greatly increased number of the deer. But there were paintings also of lurchers and cross-breds used for wounded deer, many of which had been extraordinary in their way; and Alan had long hoped to get such a one of his own. Many of the lurchers had deerhound blood, and this being the oldest and purest blood in their make-up, stamped them so strongly that they nearly all resembled the deerhounds very closely in appearance. But others were cross greyhounds, foxhounds, otterhounds and collies, and there was even one painting of a little rough terrier that was so small that the stalker had been in the habit of carrying her in his pocket. And this terrier, abundantly embued with brains, had been a snorter, for not only had she a first-rate nose and was staunch to blood, but being so small, she made no disturbance among the deer; and a slightly wounded stag, which might have continued travelling before a larger and more powerful dog, turned readily to

bay with the tiny terrier, of whom he was not in the least afraid, but only annoyed.

Alan had hesitated to get a dog of his own for fear that it would cause a disturbance in the forest, which would not be fair to the owner. But as Beowulf appeared to be naturally staunch to blood, he would be an unmixed blessing as, from his great tractability, he could scarcely be a nuisance, and he might often prevent that horrible accident, leaving a wounded deer out on the hill. In fact, Beowulf was suitable for a forest tracker in every way: besides his nose he had the necessary power, courage and speed required for wounded deer, and most important of all he was extremely easy to manage.

By the greatest good luck for Alan and Beowulf, the colonel was laid up in November with a severe attack of sciatica, which made it quite impossible for him to be out on the hill in the bad weather, which usually prevails in the hind-stalking season. A certain number of hinds had to be shot, and he asked Alan if he would see to it. Nothing could have pleased Alan more, for he actually preferred if anything the hinds to the stalking season proper. For the hinds, always more alert and wary than the stags, were not distracted in

THE PEKE AND BEOWULF AT WORK

the winter by their love-affairs. And Alan was not influenced by the desire for good heads, which did not greatly interest him.

Beowulf, who now invariably accompanied his master to the hill, learnt his business with a quickness which exceeded Alan's wildest hopes; and besides he had the natural ability, which twenty years of learning could not have given him. He was so tractable that it became quite unnecessary to have him on a leash at all, and he never started without the order to do so. During the stalk he followed exactly in Alan's track; he learnt to lie down and crawl when he saw his master do so; and when crouching in the sight of deer, though trembling with excitement, he never raised his head. Even more than that, when a particularly difficult piece of ground had to be crossed in the sight of deer, at a whispered word or even a sign from Alan, he would remain lying motionless in one spot, while Alan continued the stalk alone, nor would he even move on hearing the shot, but waited till he was fetched or whistled up.

When sent on the track of deer also he was excellent, possessing good speed and wind, and of course the habit of silent running. He would drive on the line with great dash till he got a

view, and then racing up, he became very clever and savage at throwing a hind; seizing always by a foreleg above the knee, and then as she went down changing like a flash for the throat. And he could also seize and kill a hind at bay in anything but very deep water. This ability to kill quickly and cleanly was of the greatest satisfaction to Alan, for it put any hind, which he had been unlucky enough to wound, out of her pain in the shortest possible time.

Even after he had killed, Beowulf's qualities were not done with, for instead of lying up with his hind, he would immediately leave her, and set off in search of Alan to bring him to the spot. And this, in the rough broken ground on Hellaw, was of the greatest assistance, not only in saving the time which would be wasted in prolonged and unnecessary searching, but even more in avoiding the risk of a disturbance to deer in the search.

By the time that the hind-stalking was over, the head stalker, Patterson, then an old man of wide experience, and bred in the forest, where his father had been stalker before him, unhesitatingly proclaimed Beowulf as the best tracker he had ever seen, or heard his father speak of. Others had possessed and even excelled his powers THE PEKE AND BEOWULF AT WORK

and ability, notably in respect of speed; and a few, a very few, might have approached him in tractability and sense; but none had combined all these qualities to such an extraordinary degree.

CHAPTER XI

THE POLICE DOG TRIALS

In the spring of the year Alan happened to hear of some Working Trials for Alsatians, and indeed for any breed of dog that the owner cared to enter. He had no intention of taking Beowulf, partly because he had no idea what would be required of him, or how he ought to be worked, and partly because he was anxious for the dog as far as possible to forget his old life. Besides, he did not think it fair to expect Beowulf to keep cool in the presence of gun-fire, even though it were only blanks. He did not expect him to show the white feather whatever happened; but he thought it quite possible that the memory of his past experience would tend to make him savage, which was the last thing that he wanted. Actually Beowulf would almost certainly have behaved quite steadily, but even then it is very doubtful if he would have won the trial; for although he knew the work, he could scarcely have failed to lose a little in smartness from lack of practice, especially in the obedience work.

THE POLICE DOG TRIALS

Although Alan did not mean to run Beowulf in trials, he was anxious to see the sort of work that the police dogs did, and how they did it; for since owning Beowulf he had become very keen to learn all he could of the breed and their powers.

The trials extended over two days, the first day being confined to nose work. The tests for this were not very severe as it was not a real tracking trial, where the lines would have been a mile or two long, and at least two hours cold, as well as being crossed by two other fresh tracks. Here the lines were only about half a mile long and half an hour cold, and had not been foiled. The lines were laid by different people, all strangers to the dogs, and each line contained two right angles and two very acute angles. At the beginning of the line were two flags a few yards apart giving the direction for the start; and at the second flag was a glove and a pretty clear foot-mark, from which the dog could take the scent. At the end was a second glove, and when the dog had found this the line was completed.

The ground over which the lines were laid was a heathery common, which probably carried a very fair scent; except in those parts where

the heather had been recently burnt and so made the scenting conditions poor.

All the dogs were required to track on a leash about ten or fifteen yards long. Some handlers fastened the leash to a light tracking harness, having a ring for the purpose on the withers; but most of them passed the leash between the hind legs, fastened it to a slack surcingle round the loins, and thence between the forelegs to the collar. All the dogs entered for the tracking were Alsatians with one exception, which was a poodle; the poodle managed his track all right, but was never out of a walk, and his whole performance appeared to lack any dash or enthusiasm.

Most of the Alsatians, when on the line, tracked at a good steady trot with their heads out and tails fairly low, at that long raking gait which is the especial characteristic of the breed. All ran quite mute, nor did they ever feather at any time. One or two took all the turns perfectly, without any check or hesitation, swinging back at the sharp angles quickly and surely, but many were temporarily at fault at one or other of the turns. It was then that the leash became such a handicap; it prevented them making any wide cast, and even in a narrow one, it continually

THE POLICE DOG TRIALS

became entangled about heather stalks or roots, checking and irritating the dogs; and their willingness and perseverance could scarcely have been better shown or tested than by this tracking and casting with the handicap of the leash. When the handler decided to cast a dog himself, all allowed themselves to be lifted, and put their noses down again immediately when asked to try once more.

One dog, handled by a very stout woman, tracked at a great pace, mostly cantering and pulling hard on the leash. The unfortunate woman was afraid to check her dog for fear of putting him off, and was dragged over the rough heather a good deal faster than she cared for, or was convenient for her figure and condition. This dog, running fast with his head up, missed the glove at the end of the track.

After the track, each dog was required to seek back for an article of his handler's, which the man surreptitiously dropped while walking along with the dog at heel. Then a hundred and fifty or two hundred yards farther on the dog was sent back.

All the dogs did this easy exercise perfectly except the poodle, who appeared unable or

unwilling to track free without his handler's assistance.

Even in the seek back, when the dogs were running a scent so strong that they could have gone at almost any pace, a great many of them were content with a fast trot, which is the gait that they always appear to prefer. The reason for this seems to be that the shepherding work, for which they were bred in Germany, consists largely in keeping sheep from straying from the pasture into the neighbouring crops. As there are no fences, the dogs are taught to do sentry duty up and down the boundary, and for this work a long tireless trot is the easiest.

Several ran a yard or two down-wind of the handler's heel line, but they were in no danger of missing the dropped article, as all turned sharp into the wind immediately on receiving the direct wind scent of the article for which they were searching. It was this opportunity to run and cast as they pleased which made the free tracking so much simpler than the leash; quite apart from the warmer scent, which was also their owner's instead of a stranger's.

An Alsatian always appears to run his owner's scent far better than any other, probably not because it is easier, but because he prefers it;

for it is one of the most notable characteristics of their work, that unlike almost any other breed, they seem to work entirely to please their master and not themselves; so that often enough, if a dog is doing a long loose track, and is hunting faster than his master can follow, he will be seen to stop quite spontaneously, and wait till the man comes up, before going on once more.

The greater part of the second day was taken up with the ordinary obedience tests: walking smartly at heel on a leash, and free; sitting two minutes with the handler away; going out a little way in front of the handler, and dropping to command; recall; retrieving a dumb-bell on the flat, and over a six-foot board fence; a nine-foot long jump; down fifteen minutes with the handler out of sight; and finally a scent discrimination, which consisted in the dog picking out something of his handler's from a lot of more or less similar articles belonging to other people.

Alan actually was rather late, and missed a good deal of this work, but it was all rather the same, and even a bit monotonous. About the most amusing exercise was the "Down for fifteen minutes." All the dogs were left lying in a long row, while their handlers retired into a shed at the far end of the ground. After a

while some of the dogs became restless; some sat up; one walked along to the dog next to him, but the other remained steady in spite of this trial, and he presently lay down again. One Alsatian started to crawl towards the hut; he crawled a few yards on his belly, lay still for a little, and then crawled on a bit again; in this way he covered quite fifty yards, all on his belly; and one, a Schnauzer, got up altogether, and came in search of his master.

There were several different breeds entered in the obedience tests: besides Alsatians there were Poodles, Schnauzers, a cross-bred Collie, and a Corgi. It was noticeable that in the rather finicky and artificial parts of the work the Poodles were probably the best of all, possibly from their apparently inherent desire to show off.

The Defence Work came on later in the afternoon. This work was only necessary in the Open Stake; and as there were only a few dogs, all Alsatians entered for it, and all the other work was over, the results of the other stakes were made known before the defence work was done. This made a delay of nearly an hour while the marks were added up and adjusted.

While they were waiting to run, one or two of the police-work dogs were running about loose

among the people and other dogs, and one of them, a dog called Faust, which was not above fighting a strange dog, was left tied up to the fence. All of them were perfectly friendly with everyone; and even when several total strangers went up to Faust, though he showed no enthusiasm, he in no way resented their advances.

The first test was for refusal of food: several attractive pieces of meat were scattered on the ground; the handler brought his dog, bade him lie down, and left him loose in the midst of the bits of meat. The dogs ignored the meat, and seemed simply rather bored when the judge came and tried to tempt them to eat other pieces offered from the hand.

Then the dog was chained to a post beside some property of his handler's, and after the handler had gone away out of sight, a stranger approached. On the dog resolutely standing guard, the stranger tried to drive him off with a stick. It was most extraordinary how the dogs, though a few minutes before they had paid no attention to anyone, became transformed when on duty. They stood up, never flinching from the threatened stick, growling and barking as savage as wolves, and it would have needed a brave man to touch whatever they were guarding.

After the guarding the "criminal" appeared in his safety suit, looking not unlike the fat motor-tyre man in the Michelin advertisements. The "criminal" stood against a hedge under a tree, where he was not easy to see while he remained still. Then the dog, who had not seen him hide, was slipped and directed to quarter the ground and find him. It was clear at once how all the dogs enjoyed this part of the work, and they were as keen and eager as a good terrier for a rat.

When the dog found his "criminal" he stood before him baying till his handler arrived, when he was called off. The "criminal" then attempted to break away, only to be instantly attacked by the dog, in spite of the free use of a blank revolver and an ash plant. Then the dog escorted the "criminal," defended his handler when he was attacked, guarded the "criminal" in the handler's absence, and attacked the moment he attempted to escape.

The notable point about the whole work, was not that the dog attacked instantly and fiercely on the least provocation, which any game and sharp-natured dog might be taught to do without much difficulty, but that one and all stopped attacking the instant that the "criminal" ceased hostilities and stood still. Most of the dogs seized when possible by the right forearm and so avoided the risk of unnecessary punishment, but Faust appeared to prefer what he considered some more vital point, and sprang resolutely for the breast or shoulder. Indeed, he was so determined about the whole thing that the "criminal" was hard put to it more than once to keep his feet. Although appearing to attack so savagely, he never lost his head, or refused to desist the instant that he was required to do so.

10

62

No doubt Faust was a bit too keen, for his handler would not attempt the last exercise. In this the "criminal" made a bolt for it, and the dog was required to stand and watch him go, till receiving the order to pursue; then when almost up with his man, he was to be called off and return to his master. This, which was rather like calling a greyhound off the scut of a hare, was a pretty big question for a keen dog, but with the exception of Faust, who did not attempt it, all the others performed it satisfactorily.

This with a seek back for a small article surreptitiously dropped by the "criminal," completed the police work.

Alan did not wait to hear the results, which were of little interest to him, as he knew none

of the dogs or their owners; but he had learnt more than he had even hoped of the nature and abilities of Alsatians. And the admiration and respect, which Beowulf had inspired in him, had in some measure been extended to the whole breed. Besides, one of Beowulf's peculiarities was explained. Alan had been a little worried because Beowulf, though perfectly good-natured at any other time, always became very nearly savage when he imagined himself to be on guard if anyone persisted in interfering with him. But he now realised that this was the natural result of his police training to guard his master's property at all costs.

CHAPTER XII

A QUIET STALK

That year when the stalking season came round, Beowulf was every bit as good with stags as he had been with hinds.

During the spring and early summer, if not fishing, Alan used to go in his spare time for long walks, either climbing on the fells, or for the study of some animal or bird that he was interested in. Beowulf far preferred these walks to the work in the village; and he soon got to know that one was imminent when Alan put on his heavy fell boots. Indeed, he so learnt to connect the boots with the interesting walks that he was in the habit of fetching the boots from their corner, and dropping them at Alan's feet, when he thought that it was time to go for a walk, and that Alan needed some reminder.

In the off season Alan had permission to go into the forest for the purpose of watching the deer and studying their habits. At first when taken into the forest Beowulf grew very excited whenever he felt the wind, or caught sight of

deer. But in time he learnt that they were not there for business, and he paid no more attention to the deer than if they had been so many sheep or cattle; though he was always careful to make himself inconspicuous when Alan wished to be unobserved.

105

200

We

WI

W3

coi

201

001

WZ

The evening before going stalking for the first time in the season, Alan took out and went carefully over his rifle. Beowulf perfectly remembered the rifle from the previous year, and knew exactly what it meant; and such was his excitement that he never settled down all night. He slept in an old leather armchair, which had been placed in Alan's room for the purpose, and he kept Alan awake by restlessly moving about; and even when he was asleep he gave Alan no peace, for he was whining in his dreams, and thumping the chair with his feet, as the muscles of his legs contracted spasmodically. rather surprising that he should cry in his dreams, for he was always perfectly silent on the hill, unless actually baying a deer; but perhaps his dreams were of that tantalising order, which are only too common, at least with people.

After all his excitement, it was not until his third day's stalking, that his services were needed at all.

DO

Dog

cep

2 be

MIN

tt-

his

phi.

ind

ut;

00

105

725

05,

11,

is

In a

20

When Beowulf had had two or three stags, he lost all interest in the hinds. And whenever he could see any deer at a reasonable distance, he knew at once if there were any stags among them, and he was not interested if there were not. He appeared also to a certain extent to be able to discriminate their sex by their wind. Unlike the hinds which he could kill, he was unable to do more than bring the stags to bay, except in the case of a very badly wounded one, but he would hold a bay almost indefinitely and speak beautifully throughout.

He once had his staunchness at a bay thoroughly well tested. Alan, who was not carrying a rifle, was acting as dog man to Colonel Stuart, but he was enjoying himself none the less for that, for his interest in the stalking was by now almost entirely confined to the performances of Beowulf.

A big heavy stag was presently spied lying apparently by himself, high up on the side of a corrie not far from its head. The side of the corrie was a good deal broken up, and presented quite easy stalking ground, once an exposed and difficult patch of screes had been crossed; but the direction of the wind made the hazardous crossing of the screes unavoidable as the only way in. An attempt to cross the screes was

immediately decided upon, as this was the first time that the stag had been found separated from a most tiresome old billy-goat.

This billy was the last remnant of a few goats which had been turned out on to the fell as an experiment some miles away on the poor and craggy Wancheate land. They had not been a success, and had been soon got rid of; but this billy, who was bred at Wancheate, took off from his heath, and settled down in the forest among the deer. He was so wary, and his senses so acute that it was impossible to get near him; and as he often associated with the best stags, entirely scorning all hinds, and kept to the most difficult ground, he saved the life of many a good stag; for they always took his warning of danger and cleared off, although they might not be able to sense the danger themselves. colonel and Alan, though often exasperated, continued to regard the billy with the greatest admiration. But Patterson of late would have been glad of an opportunity to put a bullet through his over-wary brain; but he had left it too long, and the experienced old billy was a match for him; besides, if the deed were done, it would have to be done "by accident" for fear of the colonel's displeasure.

A QUIET STALK

The stag which was now the centre of the colonel's and Alan's attention, was one of the billy's particular cronies, and owed one or two years of his life to the latter's watchfulness; but he was now apparently feeling the prickings of the desire for matrimony, and had left the billy, and his carefully selected strongholds, in quest of the exotic though risky joys of the harem.

The stag was not expected to get up for some time, so Colonel Stuart crossed the screes alone and then waited, while Alan and Beowulf did likewise. It was not only necessarily a slow but also a painful journey, for the screes were large and sharp, and made bad crawling. Once across the screes the rest was comparatively easy, and the stalkers presently found themselves within shot, and so placed that they could see the tips of the stag's horns. He was in such a position, that if he made off downhill, he would almost instantly be out of view; and it was decided to wait till he should get up of his own accord, when he would probably stretch himself and look about, and give ample time for a comfortable shot.

The afternoon was warm and intermittently sunny, and the wind blowing over the top of Hellaw gave a curious cloud effect. Some little

distance on their right was the highest point of Hellaw, something over three thousand feet high; the final height was shaped rather like the quarter of an apple resting on one of its cut faces. On the north side the hill fell precipitously for some five hundred feet or more; while for the rest, the slopes bulged more or less gently out, and were fit nearly everywhere for the deer pony.

The north face was called Raven Crags, from the fact that there had been a raven's nest there ever since anyone could remember. The nest was situated in a cleft protected by an overhanging jut of crag, and the ravens returned to the same spot annually; sometimes beginning to repair the nest even before the old year was out; for the raven is the earliest of all breeders, though some pigeons nest on occasions almost all the year round, and think nothing extraordinary of having eggs in October.

From the additions of countless years the nest had reached a gigantic size, yet it was so well placed, and resembled its background so closely, that it was by no means easy to see. And the old ravens never gave its position away by visiting it when any human being was in sight. If, on approaching the nest, one of the parent birds

saw a man in the vicinity, it would deliberately fly on by, as if it had no interest in the place, and would return later when the man had gone. It was impossible to climb up to the nest from below, and on account of the jutting crag above even a rope was out of the question.

On this afternoon light fleecy clouds were driven above the gentle southerly slopes of Hellaw by a strong south-west wind, at such a height that they just comfortably cleared the top of the Raven Crags. On clearing the brow of the crags, the clouds were met by a strong current of air rising up the crag face, and were forced suddenly upwards. Once free of the rising current, they plunged down once more to their old level; so that the whole resembled a long Atlantic roller rising to its zenith, breaking, and crashing to its fall, with the clouds taking the place of the water, and very beautiful they looked.

Alan, lying in a sheltered hollow with Beowulf, would have been content to wait all afternoon for the stag to get up, the while amusing himself watching the course of the clouds and the play of three ravens of the year, that, taking advantage of the conflicting currents of air, were twisting, spiraling, plunging, side-slipping, and throwing all those extraordinary antics in which peregrine

falcons and ravens appear to delight, and to show off their complete mastery of the air.

Once before Alan had been lucky enough to see an unusual instance of this play. He had been walking across the fells on a very windy day, watching an old raven idly flapping about, when he heard the well-known klaxon-horn scream of a falcon, and, looking up, he saw a grand dark falcon sliding down the wind. She passed high over his head, but not so high but that with his glasses he could clearly see her black cheek markings, against which her almost equally dark eyes were indistinguishable, and the black cross-bars on the underside of her wings, and on her salmon-pink breast and dirty white belly. And her great yellow feet showed bright against her under tail-coverts.

The falcon swept down on the old raven. Alan thought that she intended to cut him over, and the raven apparently shared this opinion, for Alan plainly heard the affronted croak, like the gurgle of a stone dropped into a deep narrow well, as the raven shifted. But the falcon, without attempting to strike, passed some way below him, and, throwing up, towered a hundred feet or more above him. She then began to stoop again and again, not seriously but close

enough to make the raven keep shifting; and he seemed to enter thoroughly into the spirit of the game, for after each stoop and throw up of the falcon's he made no effort to clear off, but waited about for the next.

Alan had once seen two tiercels in the spring fighting for the affections of a single and rather scornful falcon. The two were most evenly matched, and as an exhibition of resolute and savage flying, mounting, stooping and twisting, all at the most terrific speed, it could scarcely have been bettered; but the falcon's play with the raven, though lazy, was the very soul of grace, which is power restrained.

m

The play was stopped by the arrival of the tiercel, for the raven, thinking that things might now become more serious, cleared off, and going rapidly down-wind, he was soon out of sight. The peregrines made no attempt to follow, but beat steadily into the wind, and the power of their flight was never more evident than as they cut easily through the teeth of the gale.

Alan watched them, wondering at the instinct which made two such widely different species play together; though the raven and falcon were brother and sister compared to a herring gull which he had heard of, that had regularly played hide-and-seek with a retriever that was often exercised on his particular stretch of shore. Indeed, the retriever was scarcely ever taken there without the gull flying up to tease him into chasing him; and not the least remarkable part was that, although the gull left that bit of shore in the spring to take up his domestic duties, when he came back again the next winter he apparently remembered, and was ready for his games with the dog again.

The peregrines' game was not over even then, for when the tiercel was almost out of sight, he turned and flew straight back with the wind behind him; and a second or two later the falcon followed. Both then came tearing along at the top of their speed, which, slightly descending as they were, and assisted by the full force of the gale, must have been the equal of any Schneider Cup winner. In spite of his best efforts, the falcon overtook the tiercel; and the pair turning up, shot vertically into the sky till their momentum was expended. Then, at last satisfied, they drifted idly away on the wind.

CHAPTER XIII

THE WOUNDED STAG

THE stalkers' siesta was finally brought to an end by three hinds, which appeared feeding quickly and restlessly across the face of the hill above them, and in such a direction that a very little farther and they would get the stalkers' wind. As the hinds were in the sight of the stag, any alarm on their part would certainly put him off, and that probably so quickly that he would be over the rise in the ground without giving a fair shot.

The colonel decided to whistle the stag up, because he thought that that was less risky than allowing the hinds to take their wind. A low whistle brought the stag to his feet, but facing the wrong way. To a second whistle he half-turned right, and then bounded over the crest, giving the chance for a hurried shot only. Both men felt sure of a hit, for they saw the stag trip momentarily, though he recovered himself before he had even come to his knees.

The stag was believed to be entirely alone,

save for the three hinds, which were in the opposite direction, and as there was no way of knowing how badly he was hit, Beowulf was at once given permission to go. In a moment he too disappeared over the crest.

Presently, to the surprise of the Stuarts, a small staggie was seen galloping up the opposite hillside, and shortly afterwards Beowulf, running in view. Alan could only suppose that the staggie, somehow unobserved by them while spying, had been lying near the old stag, acting as his squire; and that on the shot being fired, he had gone straight away, while the stag either dropped, or if only wounded, turned sharp along the hillside out of Beowulf's view; so the dog, who had never seen the stag, only saw the one deer, and took after him.

Alan whistled shrilly on his fingers to stop Beowulf, but the wind was dead in his face and the dog never heard.

The position was becoming serious, for, besides the possible loss of the wounded stag, the light galloping young deer would go for miles if Beowulf stuck to him, and they would disturb an enormous stretch of ground.

As his deer went over the brow of the opposite hill, Beowulf was run out of view, and he cast himself to the right with great dash to pick up the line. Anxious though Alan was over the turn of affairs, he could not but admire Beowulf's cast and the style in which he struck, and drove forwards on the scent.

Almost at once Beowulf lost confidence and after hunting doubtfully for a few yards, he came to a stop and turned to look back. He had found no taint of blood, such as he was accustomed to look for, and he refused to hunt the line of the cold deer. Though he could not hear Alan, he could still see him, and Alan waved his handkerchief downwards and to the left. Beowulf immediately cast himself in that direction. the Stuarts, by running rapidly down hill, were just in time to see Beowulf drive away along the hillside below them and on the same side of the corrie as themselves. Colonel Stuart handed the rifle to Alan, saying that he was the younger and had better run on by himself, and finish the matter as quickly as he could, which Alan was only too glad to do, as any delay might be dangerous to his dog.

Alan did not suppose that the stag, wounded as he was, would take up the hill, which is never the deer's strong point. And having the utmost confidence in Beowulf, he expected to find them at bay in the beck below. He cast on down the course of the beck for a couple of miles or more, but could neither see nor hear anything of them. He then decided that he must be wrong, and turned to try back. He presently met Colonel Stuart, who was as surprised as himself not to find the bay in the beck which ran from the corrie in which the chevy had started.

The evening was now drawing in, so a hurried search was made of the neighbouring becks, and of those pools which most commonly held a beaten deer. Alan called on all his experience, and carefully noted the behaviour of any deer which could be seen, and which might by their manner show signs of having been disturbed, but all in vain, and darkness found them still hopelessly searching. As a last resort they tried back to the spot where the chevy had started, on the chance that Beowulf might have returned there to look for them, but there was no sign, nor could repeated whistling bring him up.

Alan returned home terribly worried. Such a thing had never occurred before, and he was painfully aware of the danger which must accrue to any dog from the horns and hoofs of a stag, and especially to Beowulf, who was so game though also very wary. He pictured all sorts of horrible accidents, and worst of all it was a Saturday, so that he could not possibly go out to look for him on the morrow till after midday; though the colonel promised to send Patterson and his son to resume the search first thing in the morning.

Alan had long known that he was very fond of Beowulf, but as so often happens, he had never realised how much he would miss him until he thought that he was lost. He waited up half the night in the hope that he might find his way home; and when finally he went to bed, he left all the doors open, so that Beowulf could come straight up to his bedroom where he always slept.

In the morning the time between Early Service and Matins dragged painfully, and he started at every footfall in the hope and fear that it was one of the stalkers come to report. He was really quite confident that Beowulf was now all right with sheep, but he had never allowed him among sheep out of his sight; and in his depression he pictured him returned once more to his outlaw ways, though he realised that such an idea was only proof that his imagination was getting the better of him.

At long last Matins were over, and he hurried out of the side door of the church on his way to the Vicarage, to change and then be away off to the forest.

At the churchyard gate into his garden he met young Patterson alone, without Beowulf, but with his clothes stained with peat bog and spattered with blood.

* * * * *

500

Be

shy

12

Young Patterson had set off as soon as it was light with his father and one of the pony men, but on reaching the forest, each had taken a different course. Young Patterson had with him bloodhound bitch, Harmony, which had originally been purchased for use as a tracker in the forest, but which had not been found suitable; she was rather delicate and a very slow hunter, but worst of all she had no idea of looking after herself, and her eyesight was of the poorest. Any attempt to make anything of her had finally been given up, when she was laid on to a hind so badly wounded in the lungs that after going scarcely half a mile it had dropped dead. mony had gone snuffling along, fairly revelling in the strong scent, and had actually bumped into the dead hind before seeing it.

After that, to have laid her on to a stag with

any go in him at all would have been sheer murder; but she was such a nice sweet-tempered old thing, and had so endeared herself to the children at the Manor, that she had been kept on as a pet. She loved hunting, and would hunt the most unlikely creatures for her own amusement, besides a little tracking work which was sometimes done with her for experimenting on scent.

On this Sunday morning Harmony was taken out in the hope that she would hunt up to Beowulf, for she had great low-scenting powers and perseverance. There was no risk because she was only required to hunt up to the dog, whom it was thought was either dead or seriously injured; and anyway she had become so slow that even on a warm scent Patterson could easily have kept up with her and prevented her blundering into any danger.

Patterson had no great difficulty in finding the place where the stag had been fired at, for the position had been minutely described to him, and he thoroughly knew the ground. After a little hunting about he found the stag's slots clearly and deeply defined, for he had been galloping, and easily distinguishable from those of the staggie by their size and shape.

Harmony, on being shown the slot, thrust her nose into it with the greatest satisfaction, and drew deeply with a loud, snorting sound. Then she began to cast herself in small circles at a trot. Patterson knew from the slots in which direction the stag had gone, but it was impossible to direct Harmony, who would do things in her own way or not at all. Presently she hit off the line, and gradually settling down to it, went on at a foot-pace, hunting mute as was her habit. Checks were frequent and, owing to her narrow casts, fairly lengthy; but she kept persevering till she came to the spot where Beowulf, after leaving the male deer and casting himself back, had struck the line of the wounded stag.

B

O.

Beowulf's scent, mingling with that of the stag, was distasteful to Harmony, and Patterson had some difficulty in persuading her to continue. Luckily in the strong breeze of the day before, Beowulf had carried the hot scent some yards down-wind of the actual line; while Harmony on the cold scent had to stick closely to the track of the stag.

The stag had taken a somewhat unusual course, keeping as much as possible along the side of the hill at the same level, neither going up nor down, though, when forced to the one or the

other, he had apparently preferred going up. From this Patterson judged that he had been slightly wounded in a forelimb. That would account for his reluctance to go downhill, which would jar the wounded leg; and with Beowulf after him he dare not waste the time and energy

necessary for any steep climbing.

Harmony hunted so slowly that often enough Patterson, by following the slot, could have gone on ahead; but there were places where, from the state of the ground, he could not slot at all, and where he had to rely on Harmony's nose; and as she would not bear hurrying or lifting, he had to let her take her own time. After about a mile the pace improved slightly, because Harmony was then no longer worried by Beowulf's foil, for he had by then viewed his stag, and cut off at an angle in the hope of intercepting him. His strategy had failed, for he, like the Stuarts, had banked on the stag, when pressed, turning from the hill and making for water; whereas the stag, on account of his wounded foreleg, had been afraid to descend to the beck, and seeing the dog below him, he had swung right back around a shoulder of the hill, and so altered his course completely from that which Alan had expected.

Beowulf had soon seen his mistake, swung

back, hit off the line, and driven straight away once more.

Ber

SE

翼

10 1

B

Harmony checked where Beowulf had struck, but hunted on when his course was again a few yards down-wind of the line. She hunted beautifully and unhesitatingly by two places where Patterson could see that small herds of deer had foiled the line in the night. And he could see by the slot that she was still staunch to her own wounded stag.

A few hundred yards after passing the second foil she threw up altogether, and as all his efforts to get her to continue were in vain, Patterson was forced to do as best he could by slotting. The ground was fairly soft, and he was able to get on quite well for a little way, but then the slot seemed to disappear altogether. He put his handkerchief in the last print he could find, and cast systematically about, while Harmony wandered off for a much-needed drink from a nearby gutter.

When Patterson at last recovered the line, he found also the explanation of Harmony's refusal to continue. The stag had suddenly turned straight down; and while his strides were short and irregular the prints were particularly deep. At the point where Harmony had given up,

172

R. B. H. T. B.

ió

日本日

20 10 10

9

Beowulf had run up to his quarry and had then been running almost directly in his heels. Not only had his scent offended Harmony, but the scent of the stag himself had been lessened and altered by his fright and consequent desperate exertions to keep clear of Beowulf. At last the stag had forgotten his wound, and had obeyed his instinct to turn from the hill when pressed, and then actually seized; for it was clear from the slot where Beowulf had seized him, though he had been unable to pull him down or knock him over.

Patterson, reading some of this in the trail, knew that his search was nearly over, and he hurried on. Before long he was overjoyed to hear an excited bay from Beowulf; nor was there any weakness in the bay such as might have been expected if he had been badly hurt. A moment later Patterson saw the stag's horns over a rock.

The stag was in an impregnable position among some low crags, for he was backed into an angle between two rocks which protected his flanks and rear, while he was well able to look after his front. Beowulf was standing before him, alternately baying and looking back for Patterson.

The stag's wound was high up in the near

forearm, cutting most of the muscles and tendons, but without breaking the bone. He was mostly resting that leg, but otherwise did not appear much weakened, while Beowulf, who had made every effort to get past the stag's defences, was pretty jaded, and for some time before hearing Patterson approach, he had been lying down in front of his deer.

Things were by no means over even now, for Patterson had no rifle, only a knife; but rather than go home for a rifle he decided to do the best that he could with the knife. He had not brought a rifle, for no one had expected to find Beowulf still holding the bay, and in any event no one dared take a rifle into the forest on a Sunday, without express orders from the squire.

Patterson was fully aware of the danger of going in to the stag in his present position with a knife only. He tried to draw Beowulf back, till, by throwing stones in from the side, he could move the stag, when he trusted to Beowulf setting him up once more in a better spot. Beowulf would have stood back for Alan without hesitation, indeed he had done so more than once, but he did not recognise Patterson's authority, and refused to do so for him. So

Pan

be |

Patterson, relying on his own quickness and Beowulf's known and oft-tried courage, approached the stag's left front, hoping that any attempt to charge would be hindered by the damaged leg on that side. Beowulf, seeing what was toward, edged over to the stag's right.

è

Tig.

d

Šė

ÖÖ

0

The stag lunged at Patterson, who leapt back; and in the same instant the stag was plunging on the ground with Beowulf, who had at last seen his long-looked-for opportunity, hanging on his throat. Patterson sprang in again and put in the knife. Beowulf after a final shake lay down panting, while Patterson, who felt the natural reaction after his momentary but very real danger, sat down on a rock.

When he got up with the intention of gralloching the stag, Beowulf came in between and refused to let him in. Patterson realised that if he persevered in trying to get hold of the dead stag, he would almost certainly be bitten; for Beowulf, though welcoming his assistance when he had been unable to kill by himself, regarded the stag as Alan's. He behaved in his usual manner when on guard and would not let anyone else touch it. Patterson tried to get hold of Beowulf to take him home, but he would not allow himself to be handled, nor would he follow him free. So

Patterson could do nothing but go back and fetch Alan.

On his way home he tied a handkerchief to his stick which he stuck up on the top of Hellaw as a sign to the others that he had found the dog; and then, knowing that Alan would still be in Church, he called round by the Manor to report to the colonel, and to leave Harmony.

Long before Alan and Patterson reached the place where the stag was lying, they saw the ravens flying steadily towards the promised meal, and on arriving at the spot they saw some eight or ten sitting about on stones waiting for Beowulf to give them a chance. Where all had come from so quickly was a mystery, for although there were ravens about for many miles in almost every direction, to see more than one family at the most, ranging for carrion on any particular fell, was most unusual.

In spite of all the speed with which ravens will reach any carrion; and though in a sheep country they will arrive before a dead sheep is well cold; yet if someone removes a dead sheep before the ravens find it, leaving only the entrails, as like as not they will not touch them, as they cannot understand how they got there, and suspect a trap, and that although no one ever does trap

顺

z

07,

ź

3

はは

q

200

20 20 20

them. On Hellaw of course they were in no way suspicious of entrails alone, as they were used to finding regularly at certain seasons the grallochs of the deer.

Besides the ravens sitting and hopping impatiently about, there were a pair of buzzards wheeling high over Beowulf in slow, wide, intersecting circles, mewing plaintively like a couple of cats shut out for the night.

Beowulf was delighted to see Alan, and he showed the conscious pride of a job really well done. And once Alan was there he had no further objections to Patterson working his will on the deer, which then lay out on the hill till the pony could be sent for it on the Monday morning.

CHAPTER XIV

ALAN FIRST HEARS OF THE GUIDE DOGS

One evening soon after Beowulf's night out on the hill, Alan went over to the doctor's to dine. He was especially asked to bring Beowulf with him as Sarum had a friend staying with him on holiday, another doctor who had been with him at Guy's, and who was particularly anxious to see and hear about the dog.

This Doctor Connington practised in Birkenhead and had seen something of the Guide Dogs for the Blind, a movement in which he was deeply interested. All these dogs were Alsatians, and he was interested in the breed; so hearing from Sarum that Alan had an imported dog, which had once been fully trained for police work, and still was a most brilliant tracker on the hill, he was glad of the opportunity to see him.

Alan was no less keen to hear about the Guide Dogs, which Connington thought probably the most genuinely useful work in aid of the blind.

"One blind man, it is true," he said, "has told me that he would never think of sacrificing

his independence for a dog, and he could not understand how anyone else would do so, either. He would understand, I think, if he could know what a great difference there is between himself fumbling about with a stick, and a man with one of these trained dogs walking confidently along. But one of the difficulties with blind people, especially those born blind, is that once they get an idea fixed into their heads, as they cannot be actually shown their mistake, and have little or no visual imagination, it is almost impossible to get them to understand that they may be mistaken.

"This man can certainly get about to some extent on ground that he knows well, with the aid of a stick only, and with no one to help him; and I greatly admire him for it. Though he also believes that no one could tell from his manner of walking that he is blind, but this, I am afraid, is a quite unfounded conceit.

"Good as this man undoubtedly is, he is absolutely helpless compared with a man in Birkenhead who has a dog, and who first introduced me to the Movement. What this man can do with the dog is almost incredible: he travels about a good deal on business, and I often see him in the town, always walking at a great

pace, no matter where he is. I have noticed that all the men with dogs walk fast, possibly the dogs like it, though I am sure that, whatever the reason, the men encourage it as much as possible. It is only natural, after years of muddling and always walking slowly, if at all, when they find themselves able to go as fast as they like with perfect confidence the relief is enormous, and they all go tearing along; and it is amusing sometimes to see a sighted person almost trotting to keep up with them.

"The Birkenhead blind man is quite a friend of mine, and he often tells me of the things that the dog has done. He would really part with his dog very little less reluctantly than I would with my eyes; and I believe that even that difference is solely due to the fact that he knows he could get another dog before long trained at the same school.

"I forget half the things he tells me, but I well remember the description of a journey he made recently in the course of his business, and which he did not even think very difficult or extraordinary. He had to visit a firm some thirty miles from his home; he left Birkenhead after midday and returned the same evening. He travelled by railway train, ferry boat, and

overhead railway; he changed trains several times, and walked five or six miles, and all on ground on which the dog had never been before. He told me he did the whole thing without a hitch; and he took no more time, and made as close connections with the various trains as any seeing man could have done.

"Of course, these men are justly proud of their dogs and of what they can do; and it would scarcely be wonderful if they were to exaggerate rather. But a seeing man, who is connected with the blind man in his work, told me that the dog takes him into places about the docks, where he could not go even if led by a sighted person. I have no reason to doubt this man's word, indeed he is a most reliable fellow. So if he tells me that, I can easily believe anything that the blind man tells me.

"I am an enormous believer in the Movement. You can give a man a thousand a year, ten thousand if you like, but that does not give him his independence; or you can help him, but he does not want help. He wants to be able to help himself, and that is what the Guide Dogs enable him to do."

Doctor Connington paused to refill his glass. "Sorry," he said. "I am afraid my pet

theory is running away with me. But for all that, it is grand to see the Guide Dogs about, even as dogs. I don't know much about them, but I am very fond of dogs in my way. I love to see a Guide Dog; she is so happy and obviously enjoying her work; and her pride and real sense of responsibility are so evident that it makes you feel sort of warm inside.

"Then, apart from the real use of the dog, there is another thing: their effect on the men's health, which is my business, is most extraordinary. I attended one blind man who literally never went out of the house: they were poor people and his wife was busy all day earning enough to keep them, so that there was no one to take the man out. His health naturally went all to pieces, and when he got the chance of a Guide Dog, I was afraid that, from his enforced inactivity, he would not be able to use the dog. However, he was very keen, and it would obviously be of such value to him, that he went to the Dog School to see if he could be trained.

"He came back in three weeks with a dog, and in another month he was a different man; healthy and happy, instead of sick and miserable. And he now walks miles all over the place."

ALAN HEARS OF THE GUIDE DOGS

Alan was interested enough in this conversation at the time, though he could not know that before long it was to be of the greatest importance to him.

CHAPTER XV

EVENING

On one Tuesday in November Trout had arranged to go to fell to gather his ewes, and bring them in to the tups; and Alan was going with him. But the weather was so awful that Alan did not even bother to go over to Lower Mirehouse Farm, to inquire if Trout were going: he knew that it was out of the question. All the tops were hidden in a thick mist, and even the dales were made miserable by a bitterly cold sleeting rain backed by a north-east wind.

It rained all day and was still raining late at night, but it cleared up soon after midnight, and the sleet and rain were replaced by a hard wind frost.

Alan could see the top of Hellaw from his bed, and in the morning he was amazed to see it covered with snow. A glance out of the window revealed the worst: the whole of the fells above about fourteen hundred feet were white, for the rain which had fallen all the day before in the dales had been replaced by snow above the mists.

STE

And this wet soft snow had been frozen and crusted hard in the night by the icy Helm wind.

Trout had waited a day too long before deciding to get in his sheep, and it was doubtful if he would get in half of them alive.

Alan had been going to fell the day before largely for his own pleasure, but he knew that now his services would be of real use. He hurried through his breakfast, and set off down the village with Beowulf at his heels. Before reaching Lower Mirehouse Farm he met Jonathan Bowden, who said that he was going to send his tups to the next market, as he would have no more use for them, now that every sheep on the fells was wasted. Even though Bowden was always a pessimist, this dictum gave Alan some idea of what he might expect to find on the high fells.

Alan had never had, or imagined, such a hard day on the fell as he then experienced; nor could he spare Bess and the young dog that he was working even when they were done up. The sheep were like solid lumps of ice, many of them frozen in and unable to move, and some buried; for these last Beowulf proved a great help, for he could smell them below the snow, and by starting to scratch, he showed where they were.

It was late afternoon when they started for home with those sheep that they had been able to collect: mostly Trout's own, but many others belonging to neighbouring farmers, for each shepherd brought in all that he could find, and left the sorting out till there was less urgent business to attend to. All the sheep were thoroughly exhausted, and could travel only very slowly, while the tired dogs could do little forcing, so that the sun was setting when they began the last descent to the fell wall.

The sun went down in a glory of rose and crimson, and Alan, who could easily catch up the slow sheep, waited behind on the fellside to watch the hills stained with the dying day's life-blood. Below him the dale lay clearly painted in its quiet winter dress of faded green, grey, and brown. Above and around him the high fells stood up in their dazzling mantle, while above all was the crimsoning sky.

As the sun dropped, peak after peak became diffused with purple, rose, and saffron. Then slowly, slowly the colour died, and left the fells clad in that pure cold chastity, which is to be seen only on high snows between sunset and the dawn.

Alan drew a long breath and turned to hurry

after Trout and the sheep. He tried to come down too fast, and with his mind still full of the splendour which he had lately seen, he was careless. He put a foot wrong on the steep frozen surface of the snow, and a moment later, he was sliding down on his back. He tried to drive in his heels, stick, and even hands and elbows, to break his desperate slide, but the surface was frozen as hard as marble, and he shot down the slope at an increased speed with every foot he fell. His progress became a series of long, slithering bounds, while the fell wall below, and death, raced up to meet him.

He shot past Trout who stood helpless, watching in horror, waiting for the apparently inevitable crash against the wall.

Some few feet above the wall was the trod by which the sheep commonly made their way along towards the heath on that side. The trod was a very old one, and from the wear of countless little cloven feet it had gained the appearance of a miniature embankment. Now all that was to be seen was a ridge in the snow, hardly distinguishable from above; but the ridge was enough to send Alan flying out into space, and over the wall. Gradually he lost momentum, and finally came to a stop, lying huddled on one

side; nor did he move when Beowulf came down to him, a good deal quicker than was safe, and fell to licking his face.

Trout arrived as soon as he could, and found Alan unconscious but alive. He was a powerful man, and he lifted him without much difficulty on to his back. Beowulf realised that Trout was helping his master, and he looked anxiously on, whining softly. Then as Trout set off home, he followed quietly behind.

For all Trout's strength he was glad to reach the farm with his ten-stone burden, after walking on the slippery surface, where anyone unaccustomed to the ground would have had difficulty in walking alone, let alone carrying anyone.

Beowulf followed Trout into the farm and lay down in the room, where Alan was put to bed. When Trout tried to put him out he retreated under the bed, whence he refused to be driven; and he so fiercely resented any attempts to pull him out, that he was left there.

Alan regained consciousness quite early in the night, and except for a severe headache and a good deal of superficial soreness all over, due to his toboggan ride, he felt perfectly well. But he was stone-blind.

Doctor Sarum believed at first that, as the blindness was due to shock, it would soon pass of its own accord.

In the morning as soon as the door was opened Beowulf slipped out. He had been uneasy for a little while, but he was too worried over his master to cry to be let out. It was not two minutes before he hurried anxiously back, only to find the door shut in his face. He lay down outside to wait for the nurse to come out; but when she saw Beowulf there, she squeezed through a narrow opening and would not let him in, in spite of his entreaties. He waited till she came back, and again asked to be let in, but was again disappointed.

As soon as the door closed finally upon the nurse, Beowulf left the threshold; he went downstairs, and out into the yard: there he in some way identified the open window behind which Alan lay. He stood looking up at it for a minute, then drawing back a little, he raced across the cobbles, and sprang as high as he could up the side of the house beneath the window. The window, even though open at the bottom was quite ten feet off the ground, but Beowulf, striking the wall a few feet below it, shot up the remainder with his impetus like a cat; and hung

suspended for a moment with one forepaw over the sill, and the back of his head braced against the bottom of the sash. A moment's wild scrabbling with his hind toes on the rough house wall, and he slipped under the window sash and disappeared beneath the bed, whence, on Alan's request, no attempt was made to dislodge him.

When in the evening there was no sign of Alan's sight returning, Sarum was unwilling to take the responsibility for such a serious injury, and he telephoned for an eminent eye specialist, who arrived from London late the following afternoon. Doctor Sarum met him at the station, and told him all that he knew of the accident, while they were in the car on their way to the farm.

The specialist's examination was short, and on leaving the sick room he said at once:

"I do not think that his sight will return." Sarum had guessed the worst from his manner,

Sarum had guessed the worst from his manner, but he asked:

"Is there nothing that we can do?"

The other shook his head.

"There's no hope?"

"I will not say that," the specialist answered.

"I remember a similar case in the War: a man

was blown up, and went blind from shock. While he was being brought to England in a hospital ship, the ship was torpedoed and sunk by a submarine. When the man was picked up, he could see as well as ever—the second shock had entirely undone the work of the first one.

"There was another case of which I heard from a colleague, but which I did not actually attend myself, so I may not have remembered the details quite accurately; but as far as I can remember, my colleague's patient had had a fall in the hunting field, which either partially or totally destroyed the sight of one eye. Some time after, a second similar fall completely cured the injury.

"Another shock might, and very likely would, return the sight in this case, but we cannot give that shock. So far as I know, it is only a severe shock which can undo the injury. And in such cases I do not believe in raising hopes which I know to be false."

"No, of course not," Sarum said.

"He is your friend?"

"The best I have."

"I am sorry. Will you tell him, and I will wait here."

As Sarum came into the sick-room Alan turned his face towards the door.

"Well?" he asked.

"Mr. Harmon thinks that there is no hope."

"I see."

Alan's face scarcely changed, but Sarum saw the bitten bloodless underlip; and making the excuse that he had to take the specialist to the train, he hurried out of the room.

Only Alan and Beowulf could tell of the half-hour that followed, but Beowulf, as on the first night when his master lay unconscious, refused all food.

Alan remained in bed for a week and then returned to the Vicarage. As long as he had been in bed Beowulf was unable to do more than realise that there was something very seriously wrong. But when he got up, and Beowulf could look fairly into his face the sightless eyes had a grave effect upon him. It was the eyes that he looked for; without them the whole expression had gone, and for a little time he behaved as though he were hardly sure that it was the real Alan.

Alan was seized with the horrible idea that even Beowulf was deserting him in his adversity. But he realised that that was stupid, and that Beowulf's attitude was simply due to nervousness, and distrust of a change, which to him was inexplicable.

He remembered a day when he had been returning alone with Beowulf from the hill. He was hot and tired, and the sight of a cool beck was most attractive: when he saw Beowulf wallowing in the water it proved too much for him, so he undressed and slipped into one of the larger pools. To his surprise he saw Beowulf clearing off for home best pace; and it was only after much calling and persuasion that he induced him to return, so perplexed was he at the sight of Alan naked. Beowulf's behaviour had made a great impression on Alan at the time, for he knew that if anyone had predicted such a thing, he would have laughed at them.

If simply taking off his clothes so affected Beowulf, it was not to be wondered at that the loss of the life in his eyes should have a similar effect.

Alan was at great pains to regain Beowulf's confidence, and almost immediately did so.

Although Beowulf undoubtedly saw the change in Alan's eyes and his sudden access of clumsiness and helplessness, it is not to be supposed that he connected them together and realised that he was

BEOWULF

blind. It took him a long time to get used to the change: each new stumble surprised him, and when he was trodden on it offended him, so that his attitude was one of rather frightened wonder, and acute unhappiness.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ICELAND PONY

For a day or two Alan tried to fumble about with a stick; but he was evidently in a nervous and run-down state, and he shrank from meeting anyone whom he knew. Sarum considered a complete change necessary; and he arranged for him to go and stay with an uncle of his on the Northumbrian coast.

The doctor's uncle was the very man for the business, for there would be a change from the thin hill air to that of the East Coast; and he had himself been a doctor till, on coming into some unexpected money, he had given up practising for the study of birds.

Old Sarum received Alan very kindly, and being ever ready to talk of his beloved birds, he did much to help him to forget his trouble. They walked daily along the shore, which at that time of the year was frequented by thousands of wild fowl of all sorts, from geese and even occasional swans to the tiniest waders, not as big as blackbirds. Alan learnt to recognise many of

them by their cries, but he never heard the familiar whistle of a curlew without remembering all those that bred on his own fells.

Alan had never had the opportunity to study bird migration, but even the homely swift had fired his imagination. The swallows and martens gathered in great companies and made a terrific to-do over their preparations for departure; but the swifts one evening would be flying about as usual, and the next day one would suddenly realise that every one of them had quietly gone. Then Alan had never seen, or heard of, a swift asleep; the very last thing at night they would be wheeling in the air, rather higher than at other times, and before daylight they were flying also—it seemed as if they must sleep on the wing.

Old Sarum had made a great study of migration; he had travelled widely in search of knowledge, and spent a summer on the Yenisei Delta where the wild fowl of all sorts breed in their millions. He had the theory that migration was not caused by the desire for warmth, but that the birds of passage, like plants, strove ever towards the light. Subject to temperature and other conditions suitable to their food and mode of living, he believed that they sought the longest days. He quoted the case of those

waders which bred on the tundras of Siberia and Arctic America, and then wintered on the southern coasts of South Africa, South America, and Australasia.

If they were in search of heat, there seems to be no reason for them to cross the equator, for there must be similar temperatures in the northern hemisphere. But if they were in quest of the long days of summer to be found in high latitudes, then their pilgrimage was understandable.

Chiefest of all were the Arctic terns, the lovely little sea swallows, some individuals of which, at least, were believed to breed in the perpetual day of the Arctic summer, and winter in like weather in the Antarctic, traversing in the course of each migration almost half the circumference of the world.

Sarum had spent half his life studying the mysteries of the birds of passage, but he had learnt so little even then that he admitted that he could only guess slightly at the urge which drove them. He could offer no explanation why some individuals of the same age, sex, and species, which bred on the northern tundras, should cover half the world in autumn and spring, while others were content to remain all the winter on the coasts of the British Isles.

Difficult though the destination of some of the passages were to understand, their routes were no less so. Many went south along one shore of a continent, only to return in the spring up the opposite coast, or maybe along the shores of another continent altogether. Yet in spite of the different routes they returned to the same marsh, and the same corner of it, to nest.

Not the least interesting point in the migrations of the waders, which was the family Sarum had mostly studied, was the fact that the young birds of the year often enough preceded their parents on the southward journey. In the short summer of the tundras everything had to be done in desperate haste before the cold weather came. The old birds' moult was speeded up as much as possible, but even so the new feathers were not sufficiently grown down and hardened for the long and hazardous sea journey before the desire to travel began to prick them.

The birds of the year had their wings perfect and, as is the way of youth, without waiting for their parents, they started the journey south. And so perfect was their instinct, or, as Sarum called it, hereditary experience, that they took the same routes, and stopped even at the same ponds, as their parents and grandparents had

164

before them. And so accurate was their navigation that some of the plovers left Alaska for a two-thousand-mile journey across the Pacific with no land to guide them, or upon which they could rest, till they struck the tiny Hawaiian Islands.

The story of migration was all new to Alan, but he was peculiarly interested to hear of their troubles over the moult; for even in his amateurish way and with the few opportunities of observation which he had, he had been surprised by the peculiarities of the moult of even more or less common English birds. That the falcon, whose livelihood depended on her powers of flight, and to whom any serious handicap in this direction meant death from starvation, should moult only one or two important feathers at a time, and then no more till those were quite replaced, was perfectly natural; and indeed so slow was her moult that it took anything up to five months to complete.

But it was a puzzle why the common cushat, or wood pigeon, should often moult so fast as to lose its power of flight altogether for a short time; for Alan had often seen pigeons so heavy in moult that a dog could easily catch them, or even a man with a little trouble.

Sarum might be a crank in some ways, and 165

some of his theories might be unusual, but his experiences and ideas were most interesting. And his facts were the truest romance.

This real interest did much for Alan's health, and the strong sea air completed the cure. So when a chance happening was responsible for a decision to return to Stonethwaite earlier than he had planned, he was very nearly fit in mind and body.

One Sunday morning there was a terrible storm of wind and rain. Sarum was tied up with rheumatism, contracted by many cold nights spent on the shore or in a punt in pursuit of his hobby. And Alan decided to go out for a walk alone, a thing he had done several times before. The tide was in, so the flat shore to the south of the house, where the wild fowl were to be found, was awash and uninteresting. He turned north where there were low broken cliffs stretching towards the nearest fishing village. He intended to walk about a mile and a half to a point called the Foreland, where he knew that the wind and seas would reach their greatest fury. In his sightless state peace and quiet only irked him, while the rage of the elements gave him some satisfaction.

He had for some time been thinking of what

Doctor Connington had said of the Alsatian guide dogs, and he thought that he might be able to make some use of Beowulf in this respect. He had not done anything about it before, because he had not been out very much by himself; and besides he realised that Beowulf had been a good deal puzzled and nervous about things, and that any premature attempt might do a deal of harm. He now thought that the dog seemed happier, and that he would have a try.

Beowulf was put on a leash, but at once proved useless, for it was his habit and training, when on a leash, always to walk at heel with the leash slack. With Alan he had hardly ever been on a leash at all, except when he had been learning the business of a deer tracker; and Alan had to be careful that he did not make a nuisance of himself, before he knew the game well enough to be free. And even then, so much was this slack leash a habit with him that he had never pulled on the hill, even when momentarily expecting to be slipped at a deer, and though he was trembling all over with excitement.

Now he was particularly averse to getting in front, especially in the narrow path for fear of being trodden on. Alan realised that he would require a good deal of encouragement before he would pull steadily on the leash. He was not quite sure on the spur of the moment how to set about it, and anyway this particular morning was the very worst day for it, because the raging gale drowned any low commands, and to raise his voice would only worry Beowulf. He had such hopes of Beowulf that he was half afraid to put him to the test and possibly dash them; so, as there was a distinct gravelly path which he could easily follow, he let Beowulf off the leash and felt his own way along.

0

After a while Alan decided from the nature of the path, and the sound of the sea, that he had reached the Foreland. He turned off the path with the idea of sitting down near the cliff edge, that he might feel the wind and spray beat in his face. As soon as he left the path Beowulf began to run round him whining anxiously. But as Alan knew that the cliff edge was still some way away, he kept on and paid no attention. Before long Beowulf came round in front of him, and facing him, backed slowly away as he advanced, the while barking frantically. As this protective instinct was the very thing which Alan wished to foster, he gave up and sat down, although still some way from the edge.

In a way it was natural that Beowulf should be

particularly anxious in the vicinity of anything approaching a precipice, because he had himself met with a serious accident, and he had also seen his master have one in similar circumstances. Yet Alan was delighted, and he believed that this instinct could be developed to guard him against almost any danger.

How long Alan remained sitting near the cliff edge he could not afterwards say. He amused himself by trying to recall a thing he had once seen in just such weather. He had once gone down to the Mediterranean by sea, and had passed a part of the Atlantic Fleet in the Bay in a storm.

The sombre grey battle fleet had not been designed for beauty, but they looked particularly grand, storming past against a background of leaping seas and grey hurrying skies. As each ship put her forefoot into an oncoming sea, her whole forecastle was hidden in a cloud of wind-blown spray. Then she drove through, seemed to shake herself clear, and went sliding down into the trough, to rise again to the next. With his imagination sharpened by his blindness, and aided by the wind and rain on the Foreland, Alan recalled the scene as though the battle fleet were going past before his eyes.

He presently got up, intending to walk a little farther and then turn back, but he heard voices on the shore below, on the side of the Foreland nearest to the village; and from the sounds there seemed to be a considerable crowd. He decided to find out what was going on, and tried to find the path down. He knew a little where it was; but Beowulf once more seemed so anxious, that he was glad when someone coming from the village helped him down, and also told him what was happening.

A small sailing vessel was trying to beat past the point, and into the comparative safety of the bay. The wind, however, was blowing her on to the shore; and she was apparently crippled in some way, so that there seemed a great risk of her being driven on to the point. Practically the whole of the village had come out to see the tiny boat fighting for her life, and to render any assistance that might be possible, though as there was no lifeboat and no apparatus, there seemed little that they could do.

The schooner beat back and forth up the shore, gaining a little on one tack and losing most of it on the other, and all the time getting nearer to the fatal rocks thrusting out beyond the Foreland. As a rule these rocks stood well out of the water

even at high tide, but now they only showed occasionally as irregular black teeth in the boiling maelstrom around them.

For two hours the desperate fight hung in the balance, and by the time that the schooner was opposite the point, a large crowd had collected, one or two of them on ponies.

It seemed that she would win through; when suddenly, as she put about, an extra strong gust of wind struck her in the moment that her sails were empty. Her boom came over with a crash, and a force that buckled her mast like whalebone; and her jib rent from top to bottom. The torn sail slatted madly, and in a few seconds was reduced to a few streamers of tattered canvas.

Almost before some of the spectators realised what was happening, she struck a submerged rock and heeled over on to her side. She was held jammed against an upthrust of rock; her only boat was smashed; and as wave after wave came crashing on to her, and pounded her more firmly on to the rock, it was only a matter of a very short time before she broke up altogether and precipitated her shivering crew, now hanging in the rigging, into the raging channel between them and the shore.

For some time a young farmer, by name of Ash, had been standing a little apart from the rest of the crowd, holding a yellow Iceland pony. He now took off the saddle and, coming forward, began to tie the end of a rope to his waist, saying that he would swim the pony out to the wreck. Those around tried to dissuade him, but he simply said the pony could do it, and went on with his preparations, tying on the rope, and also fixing a stirrup leather loosely about the pony's neck.

This pony had been one of a dozen that, after being imported, had been bought by a dealer, and turned out to grass in a field adjoining the Solway Firth. One of the ponies apparently did not like the grass on his side, and he proceeded to swim the eleven miles of tidal water to the Scotch shore. Ash thought that if one of them could swim the Solway for fun, his pony could swim out to the wreck for the lives of the crew. But this opinion was not shared by the bystanders; and no wonder, for the pony's appearance was not of the sort to inspire much confidence for such a venture. He was a dirty yellow colour with a dark stripe down his back, and a thick matted mane and tail. He was very fat, and round, and lazy-looking, with bright prominent eyes almost hidden beneath his foretop and little prick ears just showing through the mat of mane.

When Ash with a thick hazel stick in his right hand had mounted him bareback, the pony walked slowly and phlegmatically down to the highwater mark.

Ash waited for a particularly big wave; when it had broken, and the water went swirling back, he gave the pony two or three rib roasters with the stick and rushed him down into the water. Pony and man struggled for a moment in the surf, and then were washed up on the next wave a few yards from where they went in. As soon as they had got to their feet, Ash, who had lost his own, borrowed another stick from a man standing near by, and remounted.

He waited his opportunity and rushed the pony in as before. This time he managed to keep the pony's head straight, and slipped off his back, keeping hold of the stirrup leather with one hand, and of the reins with the other.

As the pony swam resolutely out to sea, he was quite invisible to those on shore, who were carefully paying out the rope, except at the moment when he rose on the crest of a wave; and then his dirty yellow head was only just in

sight for an instant, with Ash's darker hair bobbing beside him.

Two of the crew climbed down the rigging at the imminent risk of being washed off, and prepared to throw a rope to Ash as soon as he should arrive.

The pony struck the wreck near the bow, and Ash turned him down the side. The pony was by this time becoming difficult to manage, and if Ash once missed the rope thrown from the wreck, he might not have another chance; for he was one moment nearly level with the rail on the top of a wave, and the next many feet below it in the trough. By skill or luck he seized the rope; he let go of the pony's reins and of the stirrup leather, and was hauled up to the deck, amid deafening cheers from the shore.

The pony, now turned adrift, for a little time milled around against the wreck and the rocks, trying to get a foothold. On account of his colour he was invisible from the shore, at that distance, among the boiling surf; and in any event everyone's attention was concentrated on tightening and making fast the line, preparatory to taking off the crew. As the first man started to come along the line, the pony's head suddenly

appeared on the top of a great grey roller, racing towards the shore.

His little dished face was right among the winddriven spray on the crest, like one of Neptune's white horses. His sharp ears were pricked forward through his storm-tossed mane, and his nostrils distended by his struggle, till the membrane showed redly like two scarlet circles.

He came in on the wave, scrabbled on the rocks, fell on his knees, got up, and plunged to safety. For about a minute he stood, legs straddled wide, his fat little sides heaving, and the breath smoking from his nostrils, while the salt water ran down and dripped off his belly and legs, here and there pitifully mixed with blood, where he had been scraped against the rocks and fallen in landing. Then he got his breath, shook himself like a dog, and walked rather stiffly, but otherwise unconcernedly, over to a patch of sea pink, on which he began to pick as though nothing out of the way had happened.

All the crew were got safely over before their ship broke up, and within a month the Iceland pony was once more hauling dung about his

owner's farm.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GUIDE DOGS OF THE BLIND

Somehow standing by helplessly, while men close by were fighting for their lives, brought home to Alan all too vividly his own disability and, as he thought, uselessness. He thought that Beowulf had some idea of keeping him out of danger; and he determined to return to Stonethwaite and carry on in the parish, where the rector from the neighbouring village had been doing the work, as well as his own, since Alan's accident. He wrote to Mrs. Short, and left for Stonethwaite on the Tuesday morning.

He got Sarum to write to Doctor Connington about the guide dog business, and within a few days he received a long typewritten letter from the blind man in Birkenhead, which Mrs. Short read to him. The letter had evidently been typed by the man himself, and not read over to him, for once or twice in the four closely typed sheets he had repeated himself; but except for that, there were very few mistakes in the actual typing. The letter was full of praises of the dog,

the independence she had given him, and of what they could both do, and asserted more than once that never again would the writer be without a guide dog. There was also the address of the Secretary of the Guide Dog Association, who would tell him all about getting a dog for himself, and to whom he ought to apply if he wanted one.

In fact Alan did not intend to apply for a dog; he had the utmost confidence in Beowulf's ability to do anything which any other dog could do. He was so fond of Beowulf that he was determined that it should be his privilege to become his master's eyes. And most of all, it was against his idea of loyalty that he should obtain a trained dog, which would be bound, from the very nature of his work, to more or less supplant Beowulf as his constant companion. He was aware that if he got a trained dog he himself would be put to no trouble, and that everything would be done for him, while to teach Beowulf the business must require a deal of pains and anxiety; but against this he so much preferred the idea of being led by Beowulf rather than by a strange dog, that he did not think that any trouble would be too great.

Alan discussed the matter with Sarum. Sarum was all in favour of a properly trained dog, but

0'0

e2

th

m

H

th

bi

fo

bu

th

le

le

m

hi

W

25

Sic

th

he could see that Alan's mind was made up; and he thought also that teaching Beowulf would, if it were possible, be a great interest to him, and would take his mind off his blindness. Besides, considering the nervous state that Alan was then in, Sarum realised that it would be almost impossible to persuade him to get a trained dog, and that any attempt to do so, or to argue with him, would probably only irritate him.

Sarum was anxious to do all that he could for Alan; and he agreed to try and see some Guide Dogs working, and to find out all that he could about their work and training. He thought that it would be best to see some dogs working with their masters first, and then if possible to see the secretary or trainer to the Guide Dog Association. With this idea he wrote to the secretary and was told of several dogs which were leading blind people in different parts of the country, any of which he might see at any time.

As Sarum had to go to London for a day or two, he arranged to see a blind man there, who daily walked something over a mile each way, through a busy part of the City, to and from his business. Harris, the blind man, wrote Sarum the train by which he arrived at Liverpool Street in the morning, and the address of the office which he left in the evening a little after five o'clock. He explained that, though he might easily enough have taken the Underground for the greater part of the way, he always walked for the exercise.

Sarum did not know for certain on which day he would have to go up to London, so he did not make any definite arrangement with Harris; but he relied on meeting him at Liverpool Street. He travelled down from the North to Euston by the night train, and after getting himself some breakfast, he went to meet Harris's train.

There was no difficulty in picking up Harris, for not only was he the only man with a dog, but his dog wore the especial harness peculiar to the Guide Dogs. The harness, which was of leather, had a light steel handle also covered in leather standing up above the dog's back, in such a position that it was conveniently held by the man's left hand, when the dog was standing at his left side with her quarters about level with his knees.

Harris did not wear dark glasses, and his eyes were in no way blurred or disfigured by his affliction. His guide, Vega, was a little, square, steel-grey bitch, the picture of health, and if anything a little inclined to stoutness.

50 1

to

else

the

WZS

Stra

Ins

SCT

WI

real

At the last moment Sarum decided not to go up and speak to Harris yet awhile, but to follow him to his office first. In this way he would be sure to see Harris's ordinary routine work, and when it was over he could have a talk with him, tell him that he had been following, and ask about

anything over which he was puzzled.

Sarum realised that both Harris and Vega must thoroughly know their way between Liverpool Street and the office; and he expected a pretty smooth performance, but even so he was amazed at the pace and confidence with which they travelled. They walked along crowded pavements, across streets, through traffic, and around any new obstacles on the pavement, such as road-ups, and barrows or hand-carts, so fast that it was even difficult for Sarum to keep up. Never once, so far as Sarum could see, did any pedestrian overtake Harris, although he overtook any amount. Provided the way was clear of traffic, Vega never appeared to stop at all on reaching the kerb, as they crossed streets. But Sarum, who was keeping a very sharp look-out, presently noticed a momentary slight hesitation by the dog at every kerb. Vega just slacked her pull on the harness for one stride, and that was enough, Harris could feel it, and he knew his dog so well and her way of working, that he could tell exactly where the kerb would be, and could step up or down accordingly. It was the same with his orders, and signals with his right hand: they were so low and slight, and so instantly obeyed that they were almost imperceptible even to Sarum, who was on the look-out.

Later when they were talking, Harris told Sarum a story which shows better than anything else how smoothly they worked. He described with great glee how he had once been stopped by a man in the street, who said that he was interested in a small way in Alsatians, that he had two or three times seen and admired Vega as they passed; and he wondered if Harris had, or was going to, breed from her at all, and if so if he might have a pup. Harris of course told him that he could not breed from her; and the stranger made some remark about the peculiar harness which Vega wore. Harris then explained that he was blind.

The stranger told Harris that he had never been so shown up in his life. He was a police inspector, and though he had seen Harris pass several times, and, on account of the dog, watched him with interest, yet he had never realised Harris's disability. Although this story sounded almost incredible, after seeing the dog work, Sarum had no difficulty in believing its absolute truth, for he knew that he might have been easily fooled in the same way by the dog. And Harris's eyes and expression were so good that they gave no indication of his blindness.

00

20

he

sh

by

01

th

80

th

Sa

far

the

Str

W3

inc

she

20

\$01

2

Str

To return to the walk: there were one or two quite temporary obstacles on the pavement, which could not have been there the previous evening, a window cleaner's ladder, and an open trench where workmen were inspecting some pipes. Each time Vega took her master off the pavement, on to the street, and back again on to the pavement without a moment's hesitation or doubt, and that although the streets were crowded with traffic. Some of the streets they crossed were badly congested with traffic, and Vega had to wait till there was a gap, before she could start across. She never made a mistake, though Sarum had his heart in his mouth more than once. However, he soon realised that Vega knew perfectly well what she was about, and was really never running the least risk. In fact, she was a far better judge of the pace of the traffic than he was.

Some of the pavements were so crowded, that

Sarum simply could not get along without an occasional bump, but Harris never once hit anyone, although several times Vega actually pushed people out of her master's way with her head. She also had one very clever trick which she must have entirely learnt and thought out by herself: when there was a particularly narrow gap, just as Harris came to it, Vega gave a sudden quick jerk, and this acting on the man's left arm only, pulled his body sideways, so that he got through where he might not have had room going straight ahead.

On the way Harris went into three shops, and that was the most surprising thing of all to Sarum, who had no idea how it was done. So far as he could see they walked straight along the street without any hesitation, until they came to the shop. Then the dog turned in, and walked straight inside if the door was open, or when it was closed waited for Harris to open it. Harris later explained this to Sarum: once Vega, or indeed any Guide Dog, had been into any shop, she remembered it, and she soon got to know any shops which Harris used. Harris had some sort of an idea where the shops were, say about a hundred and twenty paces past some side street. When he had come, as he thought,

nearly to the shop he wanted to go into, he gave the order left or right, according to which way he was going and which side the shop was. If he were walking along the pavement with shops and houses on his left, and he then gave the order "Left," the dog could not turn there and then any way, so she carried on till she got a chance to turn. The first chance that she recognised, was the shop which she knew, and in she went.

It was the same at Liverpool Street Station in the evening: Harris had a season ticket; Vega knew the platform from which Harris's train went, and she took him straight there without an order, just pausing at the barrier for Harris to show his ticket. If for any reason he wished to go from a different platform, or a different station, then he only had to find out which platform he wanted, and give Vega the necessary orders. Vega then walked down the platform till she reached the open door of a compartment. If the train were likely to be crowded, Harris would ask those inside if there were room, and in they went, or on to another compartment as the case might be.

On some of the trains there had lately come into use certain compartments reserved for ladies only, and marked by a notice on the window.

GUIDE DOGS OF THE BLIND

re

Vega could not read, though Harris would vow that she could do almost anything else, and she took him once to the open door of a ladies' compartment. Harris could tell that there were several people inside, and he asked if there was room for another. One aged spinster, unaware that he was blind, told him exactly what she thought he was, much to his amusement, for he had a wife and family to whom he was devoted.

Sarum realised that Vega must know the way so well between Liverpool Street and Harris's office, that she would scarcely need an order throughout the walk. He discussed this with Harris; and Harris, who was anxious to show what Vega could do, agreed to take a strange route on the way back in the evening. In spite of the ground being quite strange, they travelled very nearly as fast as they had done in the morning. Of course, Harris had to know the way, the same as anyone else, and when he was in doubt he asked. He did not ask for the names of the streets, but for the turnings; and if he were told first right, third left, next right, and so on, he could find it easily, for he felt each street as he crossed it, and had only to count the turnings. Vega was every bit as good on the

strange ground, and had only to be told where to turn.

Sarum afterwards saw several other blind people with dogs: all seemed quite as good as Vega, and their work generally was much the same. One man told him that he went for his holiday each year to Brighton; he had often to cross the Promenade, and at that time of the year, in the holiday season, there was sometimes as much as a double stream of traffic each way. Once when crossing the Promenade, the dog stopped four times on the way over, with traffic going before and behind them. This brought home to Sarum more clearly than anything the excellence of the dogs in traffic, and the confidence of the men in them.

Another man, who had had his dog working for about two years, was out for a walk one evening with a friend. They were on a country road, where the dog was not much needed, and she was running loose to enjoy herself, while the friend gave any assistance that her master required. The two men heard a motor-cycle approaching and drew close in to the wall with the dog beside them. There was no pavement, for they were just crossing a stone bridge over a narrow stream, and the road came to the bridge

rather on a curve. The motor cyclist apparently did not see the men, for it was growing dusk; and he was hugging the wall so closely that he seemed certain to hit them, however close to the wall they stood.

Suddenly the dog walked out in front of her master and began to bark loudly, while at the same time she pressed her shoulders against her master's knees, and her hindquarters against the friend's, and pushed them into the wall. The motor cyclist, hearing the dog bark, saw them, and he sheared off in time to avoid an accident. This action of the dog was the more extraordinary as she was not in harness and therefore not on duty; because the trained Guide Dogs are only on duty when their master's hand is on the harness; the moment that he takes it off they become as any other dog, and pay not the slightest attention to any kerbs or other obstacles.

This was simply an example of a dog's natural protective instinct developed and brought out by the guide training and work. Sarum had often noticed this characteristic in Beowulf, but he had supposed that it was largely due to his police training. He now found that it was more or less inherent in Alsatians. He met a lady who was interested in the work, and who had a

beautiful black Alsatian dog, called Asgard. Asgard had never been trained for anything but simple obedience work, and he was simply kept as a pet. He slept in his mistress's bedroom, and once quite spontaneously showed his desire to look after her. The housemaid, who had been in the house since before Asgard had arrived as a puppy, left, and a temporary came in for two or three weeks. When this new maid came into the bedroom in the morning with early tea, Asgard got up and came in between her and his mistress in the bed; indeed he would scarcely allow the maid to bring the tray up to the table. He did not attempt to bite, nor be in the least nasty, but he evidently considered that his mistress was at a disadvantage in the bed and he did not like to allow a stranger to come too near to her.

After a few days he realised that the temporary was a member of the household and he did not bother any more; but when she left and the new maid came, he behaved in the same way, until he was satisfied that she was all right. Indeed, this seems to be the usual attitude of an Alsatian—a quiet and peaceful but determined guard over the master and his belongings in the presence of doubtful strangers.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE GUIDE SCHOOL

AFTER seeing several trained dogs working with their masters, Sarum went up to see the school; not so much to see how the dogs were trained, for he could not learn much of that in a flying visit, but to find out what he could about the Movement in case Alan should at any time want a trained dog, which he might if Beowulf should turn out a failure. He met the head-trainer, Captain de René, who was in charge of the whole thing, though there were one or two undertrainers and apprentices. Captain de René explained the principles of the work and the reasons for it.

First, there was the simple obedience work. As in the ordinary course of events the blind man mostly obeyed the dog, the dog had to remember that if necessary she must obey her master, so this little discipline was kept up, not only through the training, but afterwards by the blind man. At the command "Come!" the dog was taught to come round behind the man

and sit at his left side; then the man always knew just where to find her. Then she was required to lie down and sit up again once or twice, and to remain sitting while the man walked a little distance away. She was also taught to retrieve anything that the man might drop, even though she did not like picking the object up, as for instance if it were metal, or even more so, glass, which dogs dislike carrying most of all. When retrieving, the dog always came round behind and sat at her master's left side, usually pressing her head up against his thigh, and holding the object until the man took it, and said, "Out."

Sarum remarked on the fact that Captain de René always referred to the dog as "she"; and he was told that only bitches were trained, as they were less liable to distraction by any stray dogs, which they might meet in their work with their blind master.

The out-of-door work in the harness was pretty well what Sarum had seen already. The dog was taught to pull straight and steadily in the harness, though conforming her pace to that at which her master wished to travel. The dogs were taught to stop quite dead at each kerb, and to stop square against the edge, so that her man could easily feel it with his foot straight in front

of him. In the same way she stopped to show her man any obstacle on the pavement which he could not pass, even though it were something like a rope or a rail three or four feet off the ground, which would not bother her and yet would hit the man. And of course all pedestrians were to be avoided.

The dog learnt the commands "Left," "Right," and "Forward," so that she could be directed wherever her master wished her to go. If, however, she received the command "Forward" when about to cross a street, she did not move unless it were safe to do so. But she went the instant that it was clear, with no pottering about, and if necessary stopped half-way across to let a motor go by.

When the dog was fully trained and had passed the extremely high standard which was set by the School—and indeed the standard could not fail to be very high, if a blind man was to trust his life to the dog—even then their troubles were by no means over, for a good dog by herself was useless, a good partnership was what was required. It was one of the most difficult of Captain de René's tasks to fit the temperaments of the dogs and their owners, and to make sure that they were suitable to each other; because a masterful

sort of man needed quite a different sort of a dog to a rather timid woman. Finally, the blind person had to be taught how to use the dog, quite a business in itself, as some of them had never even owned a dog, let alone worked one for any useful purpose.

Sarum asked how long all this took, and was told about four months: three months to train the dog, and then probably about three weeks further, while the blind master was taught to use her. The cost of producing a trained dog was about £60, which however the blind man was not required to pay: he paid what he liked and could afford from half a crown upwards.

Sarum became more than ever convinced of the advantages of getting a properly trained dog from the Association. At the same time he was anxious to play Alan's game, and he asked Captain de René if he had seen anything of the untrained little mongrels which one sometimes sees with a blind beggar in London and elsewhere.

"Yes," de René answered. "Some of them are quite extraordinary in their way, but as they are simply on a string, they cannot possibly have any real control over the man. With a trained dog in the harness, a blind man, with his very sensitive touch, can feel the slightest hesitation

on the dog's part, or pull to one side, and the two are practically as one. Mostly the man with a dog on a string is a beggar or a match seller, and he has some regular pitch, or possibly more than one. So as he goes daily to and from these pitches, the dog knows the way, and he can lead his man confidently. But I fancy he would be done if he had to go anywhere strange, and the dog would not have much idea of what to do.

"A man with one of these dogs will scarcely ever cross a street alone, but always waits and asks someone to help him over; whereas the whole point of the Guide Dog is that her master need never ask help from anyone. The only man that I could ever hear of, who could cross a street with an untrained dog and no harness, had a most curious method. He had the dog on a very long string, and while he himself stood on the pavement he let the dog walk on across the street paying out the string as required. If nothing hit the string, the man thought that it was safe, and crossed over. It seems a pretty risky proceeding to me, for the dog as well as for the man, but I dare say the dog knew pretty well what he was about, and ran no unnecessary risks.

[&]quot;The most extraordinary case that I heard of,"

de René went on, "was of a blind man who was always led about by a friend; and the friend had an Alsatian that always used to go with them. How long this went on I cannot say for sure, but anyway the friend who did the leading eventually died. The blind man then carried on exactly as before with the dog, which had apparently learnt what was wanted of his own accord, from going with his master when leading the blind man. The extraordinary part about the whole thing to my mind is, that the dog had not belonged to the blind man at all, but to his friend. I was told that the dog was very good indeed, and I wish I could have seen him, for it would be interesting to know how he compared with a regular trained dog. Actually this Alsatian also was a dog, but there is nothing very wonderful about that, as plenty of dogs could be trained; it is simply that generally speaking the bitches are more suitable."

CHAPTER XIX

THE FAILURE OF BEOWULF

On returning to Stonethwaite Sarum did his best to persuade Alan to apply for a trained dog; but after Beowulf's behaviour on the cliff top at the Foreland on the day of the wreck, Alan was confident that Beowulf could do the work; and he was the more encouraged after hearing about Captain de René's story of the Alsatian dog, which had learnt from the example of his master to lead his master's blind friend. He could see the obvious advantages of the harness over a leash, and he had one made by the saddler in Harwick as near as possible to the description given by Sarum.

Alan was desperately keen to begin trying with Beowulf, and he grudged every day's delay, so he was almost unreasonably disappointed when the harness, as first made, did not fit, and had to go back to be altered. When the harness was finally ready, Alan got Sarum to take him into Harwick in his car to collect it.

Harwick was some three miles from Stone-

thwaite, and Alan decided to make a start with Beowulf by walking home from there. There would not be very much traffic on the road at that time of the year; and Alan knew the way so well, that he could have managed somehow, though painfully and slowly, by himself without any help from Beowulf. Most important of all, Beowulf would know that he wanted to get home, and would act accordingly; whereas if he started from his own house, Beowulf would have no idea which way he wanted to go. He knew no orders for that sort of work; it would not be easy to explain it to him, and he would probably become thoroughly muddled over the whole business.

At Alan's request, Sarum dropped him and Beowulf just outside Harwick on the Stonethwaite road. He did not altogether like leaving him, but Alan actually preferred it, as he was still sensitive about his muddling about in public, and even to some extent before Sarum, who was his closest friend. Anyhow, Sarum had to push on as he had his patients to attend to.

There was no difficulty about putting the harness on to Beowulf, for Alan was already becoming quite clever with his hands; and Beowulf, though he may not have altogether understood his blindness, had long realised that there

was something wrong; and he did all that he could to help by standing still, and he even put his head through; when he realised that Alan wanted his head in it.

Alan was at once met with the difficulty that Beowulf would not pull against the harness.

Alan had expected this difficulty, and having got Beowulf pointed down the road for home, he said "Stand!" and then himself stepped back, till the dog was as far in front of him as the steel hoop on the harness and his extended left arm would allow. Then he said:

"Walk up, Beowulf, walk up."

And as Beowulf moved on he went with him. It was a very slow business, because Beowulf stopped at once when he felt the least pressure on the harness. And it was only by keeping exactly with him and encouraging him with his voice that Alan managed to keep him going at all.

They got home somehow, but Alan was painfully aware that he would probably have been home sooner, and with less trouble, if Beowulf had been running free. Beowulf had been quite unable to understand that he was expected to guide his master; if left to himself he would probably have kept more or less to the middle of the road, but if Alan edged towards the side,

it did not occur to Beowulf that he should oppose him. Therein lay the whole difficulty: a Guide Dog must, if necessary, oppose and disobey her master, but that was entirely against Beowulf's instinct and training, and it was impossible for him to imagine that such a thing could be right.

Whenever Alan wandered to either side of the road, Beowulf went with him; so that if they went to the right Alan found himself in the hedge, knocking against the wall, or in the ditch, according to what sort of a fence there was. While if they went to the left Beowulf was squeezed into the fence. If in self-defence he had attempted to get out of the way by pulling forward and to the right across Alan's front it would have been exactly what was wanted, but he could not bring himself to do that which he thought would annoy his master; nor would he even hang back and try and dodge behind, which would at least have given Alan some indication, for he thought from Alan's effort to make him pull in the harness that that was not right, either. The result was that Alan probably trod on him, which made him nervous and ill-at-ease.

At one point on the Harwick-Stonethwaite road there was a short cut across some fields, which saved about half a mile. Alan never by any chance failed to take this cut, and it is doubtful if Beowulf had ever in his life walked all around by the road. With Beowulf doing so moderately Alan was not over-keen on risking himself in the fields; but as that was the only way home which Beowulf knew, he was prepared to go that way, as he thought it would be easier for him to understand than if they went on by the road, which to Beowulf was not the way home.

The gate of the short cut was on the left about the third of the way along a straight piece of road, so Alan could not tell exactly where it was, and Beowulf was so muddled that he gave no indication when they came to it. When Alan realised that they had passed the gate, though in a way he was rather relieved to go by the road, yet he was very disappointed that Beowulf had not had enough initiative to give some sign at least.

When at last they reached the Vicarage, and Alan sat down, he noticed that Beowulf, who was lying at his feet, was panting rather unduly for a three-mile walk at a desperately slow pace. He was rather surprised, but he put it down to the warmth of the room, and possibly that his ears were becoming more sensitive through his blindness, and that he was therefore inclined to exaggerate simple sounds; besides, Beowulf had

been very short of exercise since the accident and might be getting fat inside. Alan himself was a good deal exhausted by the strain of getting himself home, and overcoming his fear of running into things, and also trying to teach Beowulf what was wanted. But it did not occur to him that the worry and uncertainty had exhausted Beowulf too; and he had nothing to show him this except the sound of the panting.

A further sign of strain was that Beowulf left a good deal of his food that evening; this was significant, for he was a good feeder who practically never left; so that Alan never thought of feeling in his dish to make sure. And Mrs. Short, who thought that it would only worry Alan, never told him that Beowulf had left

anything.

The experiment of getting Beowulf to take him home had not been very successful. But Alan thought that any attempt to walk away from home would be even more hopeless; so he determined to confine himself to homeward work for a while. When Beowulf got the hang of the business, it would be quite time enough to start trying to give him orders, which at present would only tend to confuse him, and which were unnecessary as long as they only went straight home.

THE FAILURE OF BEOWULF

He sent his man down to the doctor's in the morning, asking him to call before he started out in his car on his rounds. And when he came he asked him to take him and Beowulf out in the car, and then drop them some little way from home to walk back.

Sarum took Alan and Beowulf out pretty regularly, often twice a day, and dropped them at some distance from the village to find their own way back.

Beowulf scarcely improved at all. He could not get the idea that he was in charge, and to lead instead of being led. Every stumble of Alan's, and the frequent times that he was trodden upon, jarred and upset him. He became nervous and irritable and lost weight; and though Mrs. Short and the doctor could both see this, they would not upset Alan by telling him so. Nor was Alan in a fit state to train a dog at all; there was no less a strain on his nerves, and had his courage not been as fine as a Toledo blade he could never have stood the bumps and falls that he took.

In one direction Beowulf's idea of looking after his master certainly did develop, but it was not the right direction. Seeing Alan so helpless, Beowulf's ever-strong protective instinct was fully aroused, and being nervous and irritable, he was not inclined to suffer fools gladly. The result was that anything which Beowulf could, by the wildest stretch of imagination, construe into an offence against his master, was the signal for an instant call to arms. This new idea became worse than a nuisance, and it seemed possible that Beowulf, who, though as brave as a lion, had always been very sweet-tempered, would develop into something approaching a savage.

This change in Beowulf's temper worried Alan a good deal, and seemed likely to put a stop to the attempt to use him as a guide, but the climax

came in quite a different way.

One day Alan was anxious to visit a farmer who lived about a mile from Stonethwaite. The farm was quite half a mile from the road and was approached by a good track on the Stonethwaite side, and there was also a very little used path from the road on the other side. Alan knew both paths quite well, and Doctor Sarum dropped him at the beginning of the path on the far side from Stonethwaite, so that he would be going towards home the whole way, and yet he would pass through the farmyard and could talk to the farmer.

It happened that the farmer, Timpson, had recently strung a single strang of barbed wire, on

iron posts, across one of the fields crossed by the footpath. The wire was about three feet from the ground, and was to keep some cattle out of one half of the field. The wire was brand new and easy to see, but of course Alan had no idea that it was there. Though Beowulf could see it plainly enough, he could easily walk under it, and it never occurred to him that Alan would go into it, or that he ought to do anything to prevent such an accident. He simply walked under it as though it were not there, and Alan went straight into it. He was walking fairly fast, and took an awful fall, bringing the wire, which did not break, down with him. He, and Beowulf, and the wire all got tied up together, and as he could not see he was some time extricating himself, and both he and Beowulf were badly cut about, besides which Beowulf was a good deal upset, not exactly by the pain, but because, as Alan had fallen on him, he thought that Alan had inflicted the pain, which he could not believe that he had deserved.

Alan went home as quickly as he could, avoiding the farm lest Timpson should see his and Beowulf's cuts, and be distressed, and possibly blame himself for being the quite innocent cause of the accident. He did not like to take liberties

with cuts caused by wire, which might only too easily be poisonous, so he got Sarum in to attend to Beowulf and to himself.

Sarum thought that something definite ought to be done to stop this wandering about with a quite untrained and useless dog, before something more serious happened. He knew the best way to get at Alan, and he told him the state of health that Beowulf had got into. He said that even if he did not consider himself, he ought not to inflict real mental torture on his dog.

Alan was horrified to learn that Beowulf looked ghastly and had been eating very little, all of which everyone had been at great pains to keep from him. He had about the first real row with Mrs. Short about it that had occurred in their long association.

He entirely gave up all idea of training Beowulf himself, which he had realised for some time in his heart of hearts was hopeless. But he believed that their failure was due, not to the dog, but to his own inability to make him understand what he wanted. And his theory of loyalty to Beowulf still prevented him definitely applying for a Guide Dog. He waited for a little time till Beowulf's wounds from the wires hould have healed, and also to give him a chance to pick up in himself

THE FAILURE OF BEOWULF

and put on flesh. Then he wrote to the Secretary of the Guide Dog Association, asking if it would be possible to have Beowulf trained. He explained that Beowulf had been originally trained on the Continent for police work; and that although he had, since his blindness, made some attempt to get the dog to lead him about, from Beowulf's complete lack of training in that direction the attempt had not been a success.

CHAPTER XX

SEPARATION

Captain de René was not awfully keen to try and make something of Beowulf, and he would have preferred to let Alan have one of the young bitches which he had especially selected and trained. He usually selected bitches for training between the ages of one and two years, and although Beowulf was quite a bit older than this, the age in itself was not a definite bar: indeed, the chief reason why he selected comparatively young bitches for training, was that their working lives with the blind people might be as long as possible. Nor did he particularly object to Beowulf's sex. What he was afraid of was his temperament.

All the young dogs for training had to be most carefully selected and tested for temperament; and only about one in every three or four which Captain de René saw was suitable. The chances against Beowulf being suitable were even more than this two or three to one, because the type of dog suitable for police work, inclined to be

aggressive and sharp, was not a bit what was wanted as a rule for the Guide work. Again, if Alan Stuart were fond enough of Beowulf to go to all this trouble to have him trained, rather than the simpler and probably more satisfactory alternative of applying for a Guide Dog in the ordinary way, it was likely that the dog was pretty fond of him and might not readily take to a stranger. And it would of course be necessary for Captain de René to gain Beowulf's affection before the training could even begin.

Captain de René was also afraid that Alan might have done Beowulf no good by trying to use him as a guide dog without proper training. He did not of course know what had happened, but he thought it not impossible that Beowulf had already been so sickened of the whole thing that he would be hopeless. If the dog was to be of the slightest use in his work, he must thoroughly enter into the spirit of it and enjoy it. Captain de René took a pride in the work of his dogs, and a miserable hang-dog creature could naturally be of no satisfaction to him or to anyone else. But it was not a question of his own satisfaction: it was the first necessity of the dog's work that she should like it and take a real pride and pleasure in it. So much was this the case that when a

blind class came for their dogs, several days had to be spent simply in the men getting their dogs' affection. And not until they had it thoroughly, could any work be done by the men with their dogs.

Though one of the regular young Guide Dogs would have been easier and ordinarily more satisfactory, if Alan was particularly anxious to have Beowulf trained, Captain de René was ready to do anything possible to satisfy him; and he was also particularly interested in the prospect of training Beowulf, who would present different problems from those with which he ordinarily had to contend. He wrote to Alan that he would have a look at the dog and see what he could do.

Alan decided to take Beowulf to the training school himself, rather than send him by rail. Captain de René had made it clear that until he had seen the dog, he could not say anything definite about even attempting to train him. In half an hour he could form a fair estimate of his temperament, and whether he possessed those characteristics and sensitivities which would make or mar him for the guide work. Besides, Alan had some vague idea that Beowulf would take to his new trainer more readily if he

should be actually handed over to him by himself.

So far as Alan could tell, Captain de René did little with Beowulf while he was there. They went for a short walk down the street, with Alan leading Beowulf; and for the rest they sat about the room and talked, though Alan could hear de René moving restlessly about; and from time to time Beowulf at his feet shifted his position.

Captain de René agreed to try with Beowulf, but would promise nothing as to the result. And he made the condition that if he took him, and could not train him to his satisfaction, Alan should not attempt to use him as a guide dog. For if Beowulf was not reliable and then Alan tried to use him, an accident might easily result, for which de René might feel himself partly to blame. If Beowulf could not learn the business he was to be returned as a pet, and Alan could have a genuine Guide Dog at the earliest opportunity.

Just before one of the apprentices took Alan back to the station, he handed Beowulf's leash over to de René. He shook hands and bid him goodbye with unnecessary effusion for Beowulf's benefit, and by telling Beowulf to "stay with him" did his best to make him realise that de

René was his friend, and that it was his wish that Beowulf should go with him.

Alan missed Beowulf dreadfully. Even though he had been a failure as a guide dog he had been a companion, and the continual presence of such a dog as Beowulf had been a solace to him at a time, when he rather shrank from the company of people.

The Peke was privately rather pleased to see Beowulf out of the way, and he was as friendly as ever, but for all his friendliness and excellence at his work he lacked the depth of Beowulf, and could not take his place.

Alan had had for some time an instructor in Braille staying in the house, and though with the work and strain of trying to train Beowulf he had rather neglected that part of the business, he now worked his instructor rather harder than the latter really cared for. He also did more work about the parish, and he found this made unexpectedly easy by the natural courtesy of the village folk.

Whenever Alan was about the village, no one ever met or passed him without a greeting of some sort; and many of them, if they thought it necessary, managed, without appearing to do so intentionally, to say who they were, usually

by some reference to their family, farm, or cottage, all of which Alan knew. But in a very short time any such subterfuge was unnecessary, for Alan learnt to recognise them all by their voices.

* * * * *

As soon as Alan had left, and de René had Beowulf to himself, he realised that his task was not going to be easy. The dog made no attempt to pull or run after his master, and he walked quietly along on the leash when de René took him to the kennel. There he at once retired into the sleeping compartment and lay down. Had he howled all night and scratched to get out, there would have been a fair prospect that this passionate regret would early give way to a cheerful, willing nature. But dull apathy was the hardest of all to deal with.

Throughout the whole of his training Beowulf remained dull and rather sour. He was always to be found lying in the sleeping compartment of his kennel, nor would he even come out to the front to greet his trainer or anyone else. If anyone came into the kennel yard, he never joined in the general chorus of barking with which the other young dogs greeted anyone strange. He was let out two or three times a

day into the run with one or two of the others for exercise, but he never joined in their play, and he resented any efforts to make him do so. All the others were bitches, and he never started fighting, but he showed them very clearly that he expected to be left alone.

His work was much on a par with his general behaviour. With his great brains he had no difficulty in learning what he was wanted to do, but he did not show the least desire to do it. After a deal of patience and perseverance de René got him so that he would do his work, though grudgingly, without any glaring mistakes; but the whole thing was done in the most slack and slovenly style. And he was very erratic, sometimes being quite unreliable. The pace at which he walked varied a good deal, and if he did not want to walk fast, he was most obstinate about it.

He hated the town, in which, from its nature, the training work had of necessity to be done, and he disliked the work. He never came out of the kennel for his work but waited till de René came in and took him out, and his one idea when working seemed to be to get it over as soon as possible. The only time that he pulled at all hard was when he was certain that they were going in. This, which was the opposite to the

habit of the best dogs, who pull hardest on the way out, just about summed up his entire work. He was most difficult to do anything with, because he was indifferent to praise and resented any correction.

Although de René, to his lasting credit, got Beowulf to do his work in some sort of style and without mistakes, there was one fault of which he never could cure him. The town in which they were trained was overrun with loose idle dogs who had nothing better to do than come sniffing up and worrying the Guide Dogs. De René might have shooed them away, but a blind man could not do so, so it was vital that the Guide Dogs should continue to work in spite of such annoyances. All de René's dogs would do so except Beowulf, who entirely ignored them, unless they actually got in his way or sniffed about his quarters. If a dog touched Beowulf when at his work, no amount of correction could prevent him letting off his spleen in an immediate and savage attack. At such a time Beowulf looked so wicked that the strange dog immediately cleared off, and a fight never actually took place. This was the more extraordinary as he was of the most peaceable, if aloof, nature at any other time.

Although Beowulf was so slack over his work, and had to be kept up to the mark the whole time, there was one point in which his work was surprisingly good, that is in comparison with his other behaviour. When towards the latter part of his training, he started work among traffic, he almost immediately understood what was required of him, and was at great pains to see that no accident occurred.

The general principle of his training was that almost from the beginning de René put himself in the position of the blind man, and attempted to persuade Beowulf that he was responsible for his safety. Beowulf had a great respect for de René, and he would have been really fond of him could he have but forgotten Alan. The traffic more than anything else in his work aroused his great protective instinct, and in whatever else he failed, he was never in the least danger of allowing a car to run into de René.

During the time of Beowulf's training de René made three blindfold tests at more or less regular intervals, both as the most reliable method of checking up on the dog's progress, and also as a definite test to ascertain when the dog was perfect enough to be handed over to a blind man. As always in these tests, de René was followed by an

assistant, not only to see any little thing which might escape de René, who was blindfold, but also to some extent as a safeguard. Beowulf's first tests were by no means altogether satisfactory, and de René was not always certain of being able to go just where he wanted, but it was most noticeable that he never hit any pedestrian or lamp-post, and that Beowulf would not start across a street unless it were absolutely safe.

After the third test de René decided that Beowulf knew the work, and could even be brilliant if he would but try. His only definite failure was in his willingness, and this was not likely to improve by repetition. De René had all along been aware that he had not been able to gain Beowulf's affection to the extent that he would have wished. He was big enough to realise that it was quite possibly in this alone that Beowulf's difficulty lay, and he hoped that if Beowulf was really fond of Alan, and the fact that he was not very fond of himself argued that he might be, then he might improve with Alan and become quite satisfactory. The great point in Beowulf's favour was that even on his idlest days he seemed always in some manner to keep out of any sort of danger. And the best thing seemed to be to let Alan come down and see

BEOWULF

how he could get on. There could of course be no possible danger to Alan, as de René would always be following them in their work; and there might be a real improvement in Beowulf. If there was no such improvement the dog would have to be given up, as would have happened long ago if he were in training for a strange blind man, and not for his old master.

CHAPTER XXI

REUNION

ALAN received a letter from Captain de René asking him to come and see how he could get on with the dog. The letter was most guarded, and de René was careful to point out that Beowulf's work was not altogether satisfactory, and that it was by no means certain that he could pass him as a Guide Dog.

Alan immediately made arrangements with the parson from St. John's-in-the-Vale to take his work at Stonethwaite, as he had done before; and he set off as quickly as possible for the Guide Dog training centre.

One of the apprentice trainers met him at the station in his car, and drove him to the rooms which had been engaged for him. There was not a class of blind people at the time, for the batch of other dogs which de René was training were not yet ready. When there was a regular class an empty house was rented, or if possible borrowed for them; but if, as in Alan's case, there was only one man at a time, rooms were

taken with one or two people, who were used to looking after the blind people in these circumstances.

Alan was disappointed to learn that he was not to see Beowulf for a day or two. Before he could use the dog he would have to be shown how to work him. In the general training of the blind people de René was obliged to spend the first day or two in studying the different temperaments of the men, in order to choose the dog most suitable to each. And this very difficult decision was one of the most important factors in the success or failure of the partnership of blind man and guide dog. Of course there was no question of this with Alan. Again with the usual blind people, when de René had decided which dog would suit each man, and had handed the dogs over to their new masters, two or three days had to elapse before the man could use the dog, which must be spent, apart from preliminary work and lectures, in gaining the dog's affection, and for this purpose the dog never left the man's side day or night except for necessary short runs in the yard; and of course de René and everyone else ignored them and if necessary discouraged any advances.

Alan would have no need to gain Beowulf's

affection. At least if he had lost it during the training, the dog was useless; as the great hope was that because of this affection, Beowulf would improve with his old master. There was therefore no evident advantage in Beowulf being with him during the time that he was doing the preliminary work; and de René wished to make one more blindfold test. And it was neither desirable nor practicable for de René to work him after once he had left the kennel to live with Alan.

Soon after Alan arrived at his lodgings at Mrs. Shaston's, de René called round and had a longish talk, explaining the work. He apologised for not handing Beowulf over at once; but Alan, though a little disappointed as he had been looking forward to seeing Beowulf, could see the obvious common sense of the arrangement, and was only the more keen to get done with the preliminary instruction, and on to Beowulf.

After leaving Alan de René and the apprentice went round to the kennels: de René to take out another dog for work, and the apprentice, a young man named White, to feed the dogs. While White was preparing the food de René took out a bitch called Olga and did the obedi-

ence work in the kennel yard before starting out into the streets. While he was doing the obedience work he noticed that Beowulf had come out of his sleeping compartment up to the front of the kennel, and was moving restlessly about, and even whining occasionally; this was unusual, but he paid no particular attention, beyond a resolution to make sure that he was all right, when he should come in and had finished with Olga.

De René went out with Olga, and shortly afterwards White came into the kennel yard with the food. When he came to Beowulf, he was glad to see him apparently waiting eagerly to be fed, and he pushed the food into him with his right hand. Beowulf at once came up and put his head down to the man's hand with the dish. And White went on to the next. When he looked back, to his surprise he found that Beowulf had not touched his food, which was the more peculiar as he had thought him unusually keen for it.

As a rule Beowulf was not in a hurry to come out of his kennel, but rather the reverse; and without thinking about keeping him in particularly, White opened his door part way, to try and find the reason for his leaving his

meal, and to see if he could persuade him to eat up.

Beowulf shot out of the door and ran round him, sniffing at his hands and clothes, and then in great excitement he rushed up to the yard gate, scratching to get out. So great was his excitement that White had some difficulty in getting him back into his kennel, and at one point in the proceedings Beowulf looked as though he would almost resent the attempt. However, he knew him very well and reluctantly allowed himself to be led back by the chain-collar and put in.

When Captain de René came back with Olga, White described Beowulf's excitement, and said that he had evidently smelt Alan on his hand from their shaking hands, and on his sleeve when he had been helping him. De René had intended to do a blindfold test with Beowulf that evening after tea, but he did not want Beowulf to be in any way distracted when he did the test, and decided to do the ordinary work instead, and put the test off till the morrow.

White also came back after tea, for he was going to use his car for traffic work.

When de René took Beowulf out for his work, he was so excited and inattentive that de René decided that, as Beowulf was never very fond of the work, it would do more harm than good to make him do it now, and have a row with him; especially as he was anxious for nothing to go wrong just before he was handed over to Alan. There was no advantage in keeping him idle in the kennel, and it was thought that he would be better with Alan. He told White to take Beowulf the short distance to Mrs. Shaston's in the car, before he did the traffic work, which he was to do with his young dog.

As soon as White, after putting Beowulf on a leash, opened the door of the car for him to get in, he sprang in; and the car fairly reeking of Alan, he went wild with excitement, sniffing the cushions, and jumping backwards and forwards from the back seat to the front, to the considerable embarrassment of White who was trying to drive. At Mrs. Shaston's he took Beowulf's leash, and got out to ring the bell. It happened that at the time Alan was talking to Mrs. Shaston, and though White could not hear him Beowulf did.

Mrs. Shaston left Alan to open the door, and before it was more than barely ajar, Beowulf sprang into the opening. He jerked the leash out of White's hand, for White was taken quite by surprise, knocked Mrs. Shaston off her feet,

REUNION

shot down the passage, and skittered round the corner of the door into Alan's sitting-room.

White was afraid that Beowulf in his effusion might knock Alan down, especially as Alan was not expecting him, and he hurried down the passage and into the room after him.

Beowulf was standing quite still with his head pressed against Alan's thigh, looking up into his face; and Alan was bending over him with his hand on his head, just whispering something, which White was neither able nor anxious to hear.

CHAPTER XXII

BEOWULF AT WORK

ALAN was soon able to satisfy de René over the preliminary work. He was not only active, and able to walk along quickly and confidently, a most important thing, but as he was educated and intelligent, and with a pretty good idea of working dogs, de René soon showed him what was wanted. Although Alan had no doubt that Beowulf would obey him if he knew what was meant, he had never used the words to which Beowulf had been trained for the guide work, and indeed some of them, such as "Reste," "Apporte," and "Pfui," were not even English. Any of the words, if spoken with the accent laid on a different syllable from that used by de René, would be nearly unintelligible to the dog. So Alan was at pains to get de René to speak the commands as he usually did, so that he could copy them as nearly as possible.

Before Beowulf had finished his first short walk with his master, and the walk had to be short to begin with because of the strain to man and dog, he began to realise that he was responsible for Alan, and at long last the object of all the dull work he had been through began to dawn on him. At once he took an interest in his work and was as smart as he had before been slovenly. It was a joy to see him look up at Alan, when he stopped to show him some kerb, and more particularly obstacle on the pavement, and gently wave his tail as Alan put out his foot or hand and felt the obstruction.

There were some points, such as crossing streets directly at right angles, and leaving a pavement that curved round for the other pavement opposite, in which plenty of de René's dogs excelled Beowulf; but he was so wise, and so anxious to look after Alan, that there was no risk of his allowing him to run into any danger, and at the end of little more than a fortnight de René was satisfied with the performance of the pair and allowed them to depart for Stonethwaite.

Beowulf was none the less effective at Stonethwaite than he had been in the town, and he was overjoyed once more to get back into the country. Alan knew the village and country around so well, that now that he had Beowulf to lead him, he could get about every bit as quickly and surely as though he had his own eyes. Those that had seen the pair stumbling about in Beowulf's untrained days could at first scarcely credit the safety and confidence which now attended their progress.

There was one occurrence which peculiarly revealed not only Beowulf's improvement, since he had taken an interest in his work, but also his sense of responsibility. It has been said that one thing in which he had failed was his determination to resent any interference from strange dogs while at his work.

At Stonethwaite there was a mongrel Airedale, that was usually hanging about the village street, and more often than not annoying someone, for he was a typical example of the vice that comes from idleness. He was a considerable bully, and was always badgering smaller dogs. At first he had been misled by Beowulf's general aloof and rather preoccupied attitude, and had rashly tried conclusions with him. Beowulf when attacked, though very little bigger, had quickly and soundly thrashed him, and the Airedale had kept out of Beowulf's way and left him alone ever since.

He now observed Beowulf walking in his harness, at first from a distance but presently with more interest. Like all bullies he nursed ideas of revenge, which were fanned by the sudden

reappearance of Beowulf after he had thought that he was well out of the way for good. He apparently thought that the handicap of the harness was his chance to get his own back. And one day when Beowulf was leading his master down the street, he made a sudden silent attack, and seized Beowulf by the cheek.

Alan heard a slight scuffle, and felt Beowulf stop. He thought that he was exchanging compliments with another dog, which was a fault that Captain de René had particularly warned him against; and checking him with the leash he

said:

"Up, Beowulf, up, up!"

Beowulf at once walked on, dragging the Airedale along by the grip on his cheek.

It happened that Trout, from some distance down the street, had seen what was happening, and he hurried up to where Beowulf was still dragging the other along, for Alan, though he realised that something was up, could not make out exactly what it was.

Now Trout was fonder of dogs than most people, as anyone could see from one look at his sheep dogs. And he had once worked like a nigger with a pick and bar for five days, to dig down to one of the hunt terriers, that had been put in at a fox in an earth above his house. The terrier had been unable to climb out again, after killing the fox, and had been fast in the crags. But Trout had no use for such as the mongrel bully. He was wearing heavy fell boots, and with a well-aimed kick he caught the dog under the ribs and lifted him clean over Beowulf's back, and across the street.

Beowulf's reaction to his help was the most remarkable part of the whole thing, for being very touchy about Alan's safety, he thought that Trout might be intending some attack upon his master; and he instantly sprang in between Trout and Alan and stood anxiously on guard. This was the more surprising as he knew Trout very well indeed, but he was taking no risks with anyone. Alan, considerably puzzled, asked Trout what on earth was happening, and he was told the whole thing.

Beowulf by now thoroughly enjoyed looking after his master, and also it must be admitted a certain feeling of importance which accrued to his position. Alan was known to every single person in the district, and everyone invariably made way for him in the street. This deference flattered Beowulf, who came to regard himself as king of everyone. And he rather enjoyed

BEOWULF AT WORK

making people get out of his way. Alan checked any tendency in this direction, whenever he was aware of it, but he could not always know when it happened, so Beowulf frequently got away with it.

In the summer too, when the cattle were at pasture, Alan often met a herd of cows coming down the road to their farm of an evening to be milked. It was amusing when this happened to see Beowulf marching straight down the middle of the road barking loudly, and forcing the cattle out of the way, to the consternation and labour of the little nervy hill collie that was in charge of them.

There was not a great deal of traffic about Stonethwaite to deal with, except in the thick of the holiday season; and as there were no pavements nearer than Harwick, there was no work over kerbs, or leaving the pavement for any obstacle. But Beowulf at once adapted his training to the altered conditions in the country. He treated gutters, which pitfalls to the unwary were common enough, exactly as though they had been kerbs, and never failed to show them to his master. He always avoided puddles or muddy parts of the road. And as Alan by no means confined his activities to the roads,

Beowulf was kept busy enough dodging the bad going and stones in the fields or on the fell bottom, and stopping to show the drains and tiny becks. Beowulf also learnt about opening gates, and though he sometimes made a mistake the first time, he never twice took Alan up to the hinge rather than the latch end of any gate.

Alan did not often go into any town, but he had occasion sometimes to go into Harwick, and he thought that it was a good thing to do so occasionally if only to keep Beowulf in practice for town work. Harwick was only quite a small country town, but it was quite crowded sometimes in the summer with trippers to the Lake district, for which it was one of the principal centres. Alan knew Harwick well enough, and Beowulf soon learnt the shops which he usually made use of, and was always ready to take him in. In fact, he would often hesitate when passing some shop in case Alan should want to go there.

On one afternoon, a market day, Alan and Beowulf were in Harwick; and as he had been later than he intended in starting from Stonethwaite, Alan went into some pleasant tea-rooms for a cup of tea before walking back. The place

BEOWULF AT WORK

was quite crowded, but Beowulf took Alan at once up to one of the few empty tables. He had not been there long before Trout, who had driven his pony into the market, also came in. He came over to speak to Alan, and Alan asked him to join him at his table.

Some few minutes after Trout's arrival, a foxhound bitch thrust her face inquiringly round the door-post of the tea-room. This was old Melody, one of the most reliable of the local pack of fell hounds, and one who since puppyhood had been walked at Trout's farm; for it is the practice among the fell packs to this day not only to have their puppies walked at private houses and farms, as all foxhound packs try to do as far as possible, but also to have their old hounds so walked in the summer. Indeed the fell hounds are only in kennel from some two or three weeks before the beginning till the end of the hunting season, and often enough the huntsman himself obtains other employment, such as shepherding, through the summer.

Trout had had Melody as a puppy, and for several summers since. She had become quite devoted to him, and was in the habit of following him about whenever possible. This desire to follow him was, as often as not, a great nuisance;

and Trout as a rule did his best to dodge her before starting, if he was going anywhere off his farm. He thought that he had given her the slip this time, before setting off for Harwick in the pony cart. But she had hunted the pony cart into Harwick, and, as Trout afterwards learnt, she had been wandering about the streets for some time before finally marking him to ground in the tea-rooms.

Melody was a dear old thing, but her table manners were not of the best, and Trout had no wish to be bothered out of his life while finishing his tea. He could see that she was by no means certain that he was in the room; and he knew that she could never recognise him by sight among so many crowded tables, unless he made some sign. Her only chance was to hunt right up to him; so he went quietly on with his tea, and pretended not to notice her.

After standing doubtfully at the door for a moment, Melody came on into the room, and began to wander about in search of Trout. She immediately discovered that though the presence of Trout was problematical, that of an abundance of food was a certainty. She was nothing if not an opportunist, and abandoning for the present

BEOWULF AT WORK

her quest for Trout, she began a methodical round of the tables, stealing when she could, and begging in the most soulful and pitiful manner when she could not. Presently in her round she came to Alan's and Trout's table, beneath which Beowulf was lying curled up. Beowulf ignored her, and though Trout had been telling him what was happening Alan did not know just where she was, while Trout still pretended not to see her.

All at once she realised that she had found Trout, and she began to lash her stern, and bay at the top of her by no means inconsiderable voice. Trout had to acknowledge her to keep her quiet, and as he and Alan had already finished their tea and had lately been simply watching Melody to see what she would do, they got up and went out, with Melody joyfully following them.

Later in the same year Melody again identified Trout in an extraordinary manner. She had then returned to the kennels about a fortnight in preparation for the hunting season, and the huntsman had taken her to Bannerdale for the show which was held there for the fell packs. Trout had also gone to Bannerdale to run his sheep dogs in the trials, which were held there

in conjunction with the hound show, for it was a general day out, and there were also shows for beagles and working terriers, as well as two hound trails and a fell race.

Trout had not seen Melody, nor she him, till the time when the hounds came to be judged. Trout had run his dogs in all except the double dog stakes, which were not to be run till the evening, and he walked over to the hound ring to see the judging. There was a large crowd, for the weather was lovely, and Trout had some difficulty in squeezing in till he could see the foxhounds, and even then he was in the second row.

He was on the up-wind side of the ring, or at least above what wind there was, which was little enough; and each time that Melody, who was being led round by the huntsman, passed him, she threw up her head and sniffed, and then hung back on the chain, as they went by. Trout made no sign, till on the fifth circuit Melody received a stronger puff of his wind, or some other confirmation of her suspicions, for she stopped dead and bayed, to the great amusement of the crowd and chagrin of the huntsman.

Melody's performance on this occasion was the

more notable because she was not looking for Trout, nor even knew that he was within a dozen miles of Bannerdale. This fondness for Trout was a nuisance too in the hunting season, for if she was left out on the side of the country near Lower Mirehouse Farm, she preferred to return there rather than to the kennels, and Trout had to send her over on the following day.

It must not be thought from this that she was any the less keen on hunting, for she would hunt a fox as long as she could own a line, and often long after the light had failed. More than once, the pack having divided on several foxes, she hunted her fox all on her own for an hour or two, and finally marked him to ground; when, if there was anyone near enough to see, a terrier would be fetched and his business done for him, that is, if the terrier produced was any good, which was not always the case.

There had been in the pack from time to time individual hounds that could not only do this, but which had even been known to hunt and kill a fox single-handed. These, however, were nearly always hounds with a great turn of foot, so that if they hunted up to, and fresh found their fox after he had lain down, they could

BEOWULF

course, run up to, and kill him greyhound fashion.

However, enough of foxhounds, and hark back to Beowulf.

CHAPTER XXIII

LEST HARM BEFALL

During the rest of the summer, autumn, and early winter Alan had few adventures, and that this was so was the best proof of the perfection of their team work. For Beowulf was so wise and reliable, and Alan knew the ground so well that they worked absolutely like clockwork.

Alan sometimes regretted, though unnecessarily, what he thought must be the monotony of Beowulf's life, for Beowulf when out for a walk was of course always in the harness. And when Alan was indoors, though Beowulf had the run of the place and could go where he pleased, he was usually lying near Alan's feet, and never went farther than just down the garden. Indeed, Alan could never remember having to call a second time when he wanted him.

The Peke did not altogether like this, as he considered, unreasonable devotion; for though advanced in years, he sometimes liked a gallop or a game, especially as he no longer ever went shooting. But Beowulf consistently refused to

indulge him, and appeared to be entirely satisfied by looking after his master.

Beowulf's zeal in defence of Alan sometimes overreached itself. Once Alan walked into Harwick to have a tooth out, he usually walked everywhere that he could for the sake of the exercise, and of course Beowulf went with him, or rather he went with Beowulf.

It happened that the dentist was free, and ready to take Alan when he arrived, so he did not go into the waiting-room at all. Had he done so, he would probably have left Beowulf there; but as it was he took him with him into the torture chamber. There he bade him lie down in a corner, while he got into the dentist's chair. He was not expecting to be there long, as it was simply a matter of one tooth to come out.

The dentist injected the cocaine, and while it took effect, made the usual senseless and irritating conversation common to dentists and barbers, when they have their unfortunate clients at their mercy. Then he took up the tweezers, and laid hold of the tooth. The tooth was a great double grinder, firmly stuck in, and the dentist had to press his left hand against Alan's jaw, and fairly pull to make any impression at all. At the first

attempt the tweezers slipped, and as the dentist got a second hold, Alan thought that he heard Beowulf shift his position. He would have given the order "Down!" again, had not his mouth been full of the dentist's hand.

The dentist got a firm grip, braced himself, gave a tug, and with a satisfied grunt, pulled out the tooth. But his satisfaction was short-lived as Beowulf, with a swift rush across the room, had him by the right wrist. He let out a howl of anguish; and Alan realising what had happened called "Down!"; whereupon Beowulf immediately released the dentist, but remained standing between him and his master, ready to resume the offensive on the least excuse.

The dentist was quite unhurt, and Alan was inclined to regard the whole thing as rather a joke, but this view was not shared by the dentist, who vowed that on his next visit Alan must come alone, or not at all.

Another of Beowulf's peculiarities, arising out of his care for Alan, was that since his master's blindness, he had developed a perfect horror of fire. It seems natural to any animal to be suspicious of fire, and there is very little extraordinary in that a dog, as often enough happens, should in the case of fire arouse the sleeping household

by his barking. It is very useful to his owner no doubt, but it does not require much intelligence, or courage, on the part of the dog, to make a noise when he thinks that he is going to be hurt.

The first of Beowulf's efforts in the fire-brigade way was actually less practical than the ordinary barking or howling dog, but it was more interesting from the dog's point of view. Alan had that morning received several new books in Braille; as all Braille must be, they were bulky volumes, and in order to make room for them on a shelf, where he could find them easily, Alan determined to destroy a pile of old papers, which now that he could no longer read them, were of no use to him, anyway. In the library there was a very wide stone hearth, so there was no risk of any accident, and he decided to burn them as the simplest way of getting rid of them.

Beowulf did not appear to agree that there was no risk, for as the first armful of papers blazed bravely up, and Alan returned with a second, he ran in in front of him barking and absolutely refused to let him approach the fire a second time. And even after Alan had drawn back to give Beowulf his way, and to encourage him in

LEST HARM BEFALL

such carefulness, he remained in front of the fire and between it and Alan, till the flames from the papers had quite died down.

Another time while sitting in a different room, Alan heard a log fall with a crash, and a moment later he could smell the carpet smouldering. He heard Beowulf get up and growl, and he rang for Mrs. Short to come in and see that all was safe. It was this having to get help for a perfectly simple thing, which, however, he was powerless to do himself, which brought home to him more than anything else the curse of his blindness.

When Mrs. Short arrived, she found Beowulf, still grumbling to himself, in the act of scraping the last of the glowing cinders off the carpet with his feet. That he had already removed several was shown by the brown stains, where the carpet had been burnt, and the sharp smell of the singed hair on Beowulf's feet.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE BRAVE ADVENTURE

One day in the week before Christmas, Alan was returning up the village street to his lunch, when he met Tom Ridge, the landlord of the "Woodman, Spare the Tree," which was the curious sign of the village inn. Ridge's face, usually red enough for anything, now shone like a frosty sun under the influence of the bitter Helm wind.

Luckily for its inhabitants, Stonethwaite was only liable to the tail end of the Helm wind, which blows off Crossfell with such strength that sometimes it flattens out the potato stitches, and blows the turnips clean out of the ground. And there is one place, where it comes down a narrow valley in sudden gusts, which at times are even dangerous to human life. There is a story that three men, a father and his two sons, were once going to work past the bad place, when a particularly furious gust or squall struck them. The wind caught the middle one of the three, who was the father, picked him up off the ground, and

THE BRAVE ADVENTURE

blew him over some crags to his death on the rocks and screes below.

Ridge, as was the practice with all the village people since Alan's blindness, greeted him with some remark on the weather or other trivial matter.

"'Tis a fine day, passon, but this Hellum wind goeth through me auld banes in sic a fashion."

"'Morning, Ridge," Alan replied. "I don't trust your weather though myself, for I fancy we

shall have snow before long."

"Nay, sir, thou beest wrong there, I reckon, 'tis as clear as ought noo, though 'twas gayly misty early on. Indade, there be a young coople staying at t' inn, and they be gane oop te t' Red Pike this hour a'gone. 'Twas over thick afore."

"Well, I hope they may get down all right," Alan said, "for I can smell snow in the wind clearly, but no doubt it will hold off till dark,

anyway."

"I reckon 'twill, sir; there be no sign of snow as I can see."

"Well, good day, Ridge."

"Good day to ye, sir."

For all Ridge's confidence, before the afternoon was spent heavy black snow-clouds began to blow up from the east, and the top of the Red

Pike, and indeed all the high fells, were soon enveloped in thick mist.

About five o'clock the wind strengthened and it began to snow heavily.

As the night got worse, Alan decided to go down the village street and visit old Mrs. Thurlston. Many years before, Thurlston had been caught out on Blenthorpe in a blizzard: he and another man, Parker, had been out shepherding when the snow came on; the weather was so bad that the two men, although born in the village and thoroughly acquainted with the fells, became confused and lost their way down. The descent to Stonethwaite could only be effected in one or two spots by means of trods, and they were unable to find any of the trods down.

The descent on the side of Blenthorpe opposite to Stonethwaite was gentle and practicable anywhere, and the two men were compelled to go down that way, although it meant going out of their way by no less than twelve miles. They got down off the fell, and found a lonely hogghouse, part of which was filled with hay. It was then late at night and the men were very exhausted; indeed they had more than once despaired of getting down at all, and it was only their great resolution which had kept them going.

THE BRAVE ADVENTURE

Parker was for stopping in the hogghouse till morning, and keeping warmth and life in themselves by firing the hay; and he hoped also, though without much confidence, that the conflagration might be seen and bring them help. Thurlston had no qualms about destroying the hogghouse and its contents, to whomsoever they might belong. But he knew that his wife would be frightfully anxious, and rather than prolong her worry he decided to push on; and Parker, who was single, went with him.

They both reached home safely in the early hours of the morning: and the terrible state in which they were, can best be imagined from the fact that Thurlston had lost the heavy boot and sock off one leg; yet both his feet were so numb, that he was not even aware that he had been walking with one leg barefoot over the snow and flints.

Thurlston had now been dead some years; but his widow had never forgotten her long and seemingly hopeless vigil, and was always much depressed by any very bad weather.

Alan had to pass the "Woodman, Spare the Tree" on his way to Mrs. Thurlston's cottage, and he called in on the way to make sure that the holiday-makers who had gone to climb the Red

Pike had returned safely. When he entered the bar he found that they had not come back, and there was almost universal fear among those present as to their fate. Alan knew as well as the others, that if the two townsfolk were compelled to spend such a night out on the Red Pike, without shelter of any sort, their chance of being alive in the morning was very slight indeed.

He made the suggestion that someone ought to go and try to find them, and bring them in. But Ridge voiced the general opinion when he said:

"Mr. Stuart, thou canst have ne idea what like a night it is, te say sic a thing. In all me life I never see sic a night: ootbye thou canst ne see thy hand afore thy face. An there were a li'le chance there'd be a body te gang. But I'ld be flate te gang oop te me ain intak', wi'out being wasted. 'Twould be death ne less te try and gang oot te Red Pike. Ne body could see t' way in sic weather."

There was a chorus from the others of "Ai. Tom Ridge have spoke t' truth."

Alan turned towards the door.

"I expect you are right, Ridge. Day and night are the same to Beowulf and me now, and I don't realise what the night is like. It must

THE BRAVE ADVENTURE

be bad for those poor folk. Heaven send they get in somewhere."

However, as Beowulf took him out into the street, and Alan gave the order "Right" which was away from home and in the opposite direction to that which Beowulf was anxious to take, he received the full force of the storm in his face, and could guess what it must be like.

As with bent head he walked on towards Mrs. Thurlston's cottage, he recalled the words that he had used to Ridge: "Day and night are the same to me and Beowulf." Was it true?—and if so, might not he be the only man alive who could get up the Red Pike on such a night? He recognised the perfect truth of Ridge's statement that no sighted man could do it; because the strongest lantern would be worse than useless as long as it continued snowing, since the flakes would only reflect the rays into the bearer's face; but was it impossible for Beowulf and himself? It would not be a very great deal more difficult for them to get up now, than it would be on a perfectly clear day. The chief difficulty would be the snow hiding the path from Beowulf's eyes, and muffling the feel of it from his own feet.

He did not know if he could get up, even on a clear day, but he did not think it altogether

impossible, for there was a well-defined path which he knew well and which he had many times been up in his sighted days. The real difficulty was going to be the snow on the path making it difficult to find or keep.

Suddenly Beowulf swung round a corner in the street, and Alan became aware that in his preoccupation he had passed Mrs. Thurlston's cottage. He dropped the harness, thereby stopping Beowulf, and stood for a moment considering. The thing was frightfully difficult, maybe even impossible, but was it more unlikely of success than the little yellow Iceland pony's swim out to the wreck at the Foreland?

Here at last was a chance, though a slight one, where the curse of blindness might be turned into a blessing.

Alan suddenly realised that never before since his accident had he publicly made the rather cowardly remark about night and day being the same. What had made him do it just now, and in the public bar of an inn of all places, where he should have been particularly careful not to say anything of the sort?

He turned his face towards home, and as Beowulf came up to his left side, he took hold once more of the harness and said resolutely "Forward!" Beowulf, only too glad of the chance to get out of the awful weather as quickly as possible, walked on fast, pulling hard against the breast girth.

On reaching the Vicarage Alan let himself in, kicked off his high rubber boots, and took his slippers from Beowulf, who had picked them up, and was holding them in his mouth. Then he found his own way up the stairs with the ease born of long practice. As he went up, he could hear Mrs. Short moving about in the kitchen, but the old house was solidly built, and he knew that, without the supersensitive ears of blindness, she could not hear him. He changed his trousers for plus-fours, put on an extra sweater and a heavy closely woven tweed coat. Then he said to Beowulf, who was lying out of his way under the bed, as was his habit:

"Beowulf, my boots."

It was more than a year since Beowulf had received that order, which in the old days had preceded at any rate a good walk, and possibly even a day amongst the deer. He forgot that it was a curious time of day to receive such an order, and he only remembered what it meant, and what usually followed. He sprang up with a little yip of pleasure, and dashed to the corner

behind the curtain, where Alan's heavy fell boots always were, and where they had lain idle since the day of Alan's accident, which was the last time that they had been worn. He brought one in his mouth, dropped it at Alan's feet, and went back for the other. It was noticeable how, on being told "Beowulf, my boots," which was different from the usual "Apporte," and no doubt on the association of ideas connected with the boots, Beowulf's mind had gone back to the old seeing days, when he had always dropped the boots at Alan's feet, whereas now he always gave everything into his hand. Of course, even in the old days he had retrieved to hand, but as he had formed the habit of bringing the boots of his own accord, as an incitement to Alan for a walk, they were rather outside the usual retrieving in his mind, and he had never done anything but drop them, even when sent to fetch them as now.

Alan laced up his boots, and went into the dining-room to fill a flask with whisky. Mrs. Short was still unaware that he had returned from the village, and he thought of slipping quietly out. Then he remembered that he must be out most of the night, anyway, and that she would naturally be very anxious when he did not

THE BRAVE ADVENTURE

return. He rang the bell, and when Mrs. Short answered it he violated his profession with a whopping lie, for he told her that he was going to supper with the doctor at the other end of the village, and that as the night was so bad he had put on his old clothes. And he added that unless it cleared up, he would probably spend the night with the doctor, who would fit him up with pyjamas, etc., and that in any event Mrs. Short was not to wait up or worry.

Mrs. Short made some scornful remark to the effect that Doctor Sarum ought to have more sense than to ask a body out on such a night and that if he must have him, and Mr. Stuart was fool enough to go, he might at least have the decency to send his car for him.

Alan waited for no more, but selecting a stout blackthorn from the chimney-pot, which acted as an umbrella-stand, he spoke to Beowulf and sallied forth into the night.

CHAPTER XXV

THE ASCENT OF THE RED PIKE

Before following Alan and Beowulf further, it will be necessary to be quite clear about the approach to, and ascent of, the Red Pike. For without this it is impossible to understand the task before them, and the difficulties to be overcome.

The top of the Red Pike is three thousand, one hundred and a few odd feet high, and commands a magnificent view of all the fell country in every direction. No less than four of the principal lakes can be clearly seen, and on a clear day the Scotch coast stands well out beyond the Solway. It is almost entirely for the view that the ascent of the Red Pike is popular, for as a climbing proposition there is nothing to it, at least unless one is looking for difficulties.

There is a well-defined path right up to the top, worn by the feet of many trippers, and clearly marked at intervals by a series of stones, which have been painted white by an enterprising local hotel manager. Alan knew the path well, for he

had often gone up for the view, though never in the holiday season when the place was not improved by empty bottles, tins and cigarette packets. Some of the path is steep, and some of it borders precipices which might bother anyone with a very bad head, but as long as one keeps to the footpath, there is absolutely no danger. Once off the path, it is easy enough to get into places where a misplaced foot may mean a fall of several hundred feet.

The danger for the couple of young townsfolk, who were out somewhere on the Red Pike in the storm, was that they would get off the path, and either fall over some crags, or else, realising that they were in a dangerous place, sit down to wait till morning before they moved; in which case, on such a night, they ran a very big risk of dying of cold and exposure, especially if they were at all exhausted when they finally stopped. As they had not yet returned to the village, it seemed almost certain that they had lost the path, and indeed once the path was covered with snow, as they were unfamiliar with it, it would have been extraordinary had they been able to keep it.

So much for the actual ascent of the Pike. The approach to it from Stonethwaite is achieved by some two and a half miles along the road, then through five fields, and across a mile or more of the lower fell breast, before the steep part is reached.

It was the approach that worried Alan more than the actual ascent. The steep path, because of its very steepness, was clearly made, and Alan hoped to be able to feel it even through the snow. But the path across the fields, and up the lower breast, was no more definite than any other path on reasonably level ground. It was nothing more in fact than a slight indentation caused by the tamping of the soil, and a shortness of the herbage from the wear and tear of many boots. Such a path under only an inch or two of snow would be almost impossible to find or keep; and though a divergence from it entailed no danger, it would mean missing the start of the path proper. And though Alan, with his sight and on a clear day, could have climbed the Pike in half a dozen different places, he knew that blind he was entirely dependent on the path for the steep part.

He decided that it would be impossible to keep to the path on the fell breast, and that he would not even attempt it.

Beowulf walked steadily down the road, till he came to the fork about half a mile out of the

village. It is doubtful if any man in such weather could have recognised the fork, and it would have been largely chance which road he would have taken; though by hugging one hedge or the other, he might have taken the road he wanted, without knowing when he passed the other branching off. Beowulf, however, knew when he reached it, and pulled up for a direction. Alan said "Left," and on they went at a good pace with the wind behind them.

As Beowulf had never been asked to lead Alan through the gate off the road, where the path to the Red Pike started, he had no idea of stopping for it. Nor could Alan have found it, or at least have been sure that the one which he found was the right one. But he did not bother much, for he knew that, within a quarter of a mile or so after passing it, the road crossed a beck, which though not large was too strong and rapid to have frozen in the recent cold weather, and which he therefore could not fail to hear, even if he did not feel the slight rise and fall in the road over the bridge.

When he heard the beck, and before crossing it, Alan climbed the wall on his left. Beowulf jumped it and immediately afterwards he pressed his head against Alan's left knee, so that Alan should know where to find him. Alan took hold of the harness, and walked back along the wall parallel to the road up which he had come.

Once in the field and with no path, nor gate out which he could see, Beowulf naturally had no idea where he was expected to go, and could only act on the orders given him. But as he walked along the wall, Alan knew perfectly when he was walking parallel, and when bending towards or away from it. On this night it was particularly easy on account of the strong wind, but even without the wind, a man who has been blind any time can tell easily and accurately, when he is in a street, say, not only when he passes a side street or alley, but even an open doorway.

What sense it is, which being highly developed by blindness, allows a man to do this, I cannot say; whether he feels the currents of air which are turned by the wall, or come through the opening; or whether there is some change in the sounds, caused by the multitude of tiny echoes off any wall. Whatever sense it is, and difficult though it may be for a sighted person to understand it, it is just as much a fact as that some animals, and more particularly birds, can foretell a change in the weather long before man, even with his scientific instruments, can do so.

It was on this sense, along with his memory, that Alan was chiefly relying to do his small share of finding their way up the Red Pike, and to give Beowulf the necessary orders; for with the strong wind, the general carry of which he had carefully noted before he left the road, he expected to feel every crag and ghyll which he passed.

On reaching the wall, which joined the road wall at right angles, Alan turned up it, and then climbing over the next cross wall, he went on along the continuation of the wall which he had been following away from the road. Whenever he crossed a wall, and found no wall beyond leading in the right direction, he turned left till he met one, and then right, and along it. In this way he presently came to the fell wall proper, which he recognised not only because it was the sixth wall that he came to, and he believed that there were but five fields to cross, but also because it was the only wall he crossed which had a strand of wire running along the top.

The extra high fell wall, with the wire on top, was none too easy for Alan to cross; but he managed to climb up, and carefully avoiding the wire on top, which was plain and not barbed, he let himself down on the far side.

Without knowing exactly where he was, Alan knew at least that he was within a quarter of a mile, actually nearer half that distance, from the point where the path came out on to the fell, and that the path was somewhere along to his left. However, he had no intention of trying to use the path yet awhile, and rather surprisingly he turned to the right and away from it.

He walked alongside the wall for about ten minutes, and until he felt, by that same sense which told him that he was going along the wall, that there was a deep ghyll in the fell side on his left. He then turned straight up towards the ghyll, thereby abandoning any further guidance from the friendly walls. Presently he felt by the slope of the ground under his feet that he was walking along the side of the ghyll, and getting nearly into the bottom he continued upwards along its course. He did not go right into the bottom, because he knew that the little beck, really no more than a gutter, in its bottom would be frozen, and that the slippery ice would be dangerous.

It was by making use of this ghyll that Alan hoped to avoid the necessity of keeping to the path over the lower breast. For he knew that somewhere in its course the path crossed the

THE ASCENT OF THE RED PIKE

ghyll. This crossing was among some little crags which he hoped to be able to recognise; and it was then that he hoped to get on to the path.

The disadvantages of the plan were undoubted: that he might not know when he crossed the path, and that he might miss the two people for whom he was looking, who might have descended below the point where he expected to meet the path. But against this he believed that he was more likely to be able to find the path in the ghyll than if he was to keep to it up the breast. And if the trippers had crossed below the ghyll in their downward path, they ought to have been able to do the rest in which there was only one at all difficult part; so that the chances were greatly in favour of their being above that point.

Alan knew that he had to climb up the ghyll for some seven or eight hundred feet before meeting the path, but he had no confidence in being able to judge the distance that he had gone, and he was relying entirely on recognising the place.

Once in the steep part of the ghyll, he let go of Beowulf's harness, and in fact of the dog altogether, and climbed up on his own; for with the conformation of the ground and the air currents in the ghyll to help him, there was no chance of his losing his way; nor could Beowulf be of any assistance to him, while there were a few steep places where he was glad of the use of his hands to help himself.

He kept scrambling up, sometimes over rocks, but more often coarse grass, junipers, or screes. Owing to the conformation of the ground, and the direction of the wind, there was very little

snow actually in the ghyll itself.

Two or three times he thought from the feel of the ground that he was near the path; but as he could not find it, he decided that he must be mistaken, and he kept on up. He did not know definitely where he was, till he came to a spot where a smaller ghyll ran down, and joined the one up which he was travelling. He was made aware of the smaller ghyll by the current of air coming in at the fork; he recognised the junction and he knew that he had passed and missed the path, so he turned and went back.

He climbed down till he found himself in amongst some rocks, and he was then sure that the path was near. He began hunting about, but carefully, for the ground was dangerous, when he heard Beowulf whine a little below him. When he got down to where Beowulf was, he found him standing in the path. He was facing down, and anxious to take his master off home, but on Alan facing the other way and saying "Come" he came at once to his left side facing up towards the Pike.

Alan picked up the harness and said "Forward."

From this point the whole responsibility lay on Beowulf. As long as he kept in the narrow snow-covered path, all would be well, but Alan could not help or direct him; and if Beowulf once lost it, they would be lucky if they ever regained it.

Beowulf walked on strongly with little or no hesitation, his head low, almost on the level of his knees, and his ears pricked forward; and his tail, as ever when he was working, swinging against his hocks, the best symbol of the concentration of his mind. Alan, his head and shoulders bowed, struggled after him, his breath coming in quick pants from the effort of trying to keep up with the pace set by Beowulf, which, right enough on level ground, was pretty severe up the steep side of the Red Pike. He would not steady Beowulf for fear of distracting his attention from the path.

From time to time Alan shouted as loud as he could, though he knew that it was nearly useless, for the wind plucked his voice from his very lips. Indeed, such was the force of the wind, that when rounding any spur or other particularly exposed bit of ground, he was in some fear of being blown clean off and away into space.

Every now and then he passed places in the path, either steep and sudden ascents, or sharp turns, or dips, which he recognised, and he mostly had a fair idea of how high he was getting. As he got higher, and found no sign of the couple for whom he was searching, he became increasingly afraid that they had wandered off the path; and if they were off the path and out of earshot of it, which in the present weather conditions was no great distance, there seemed very little chance of finding them.

He was beginning to think the whole thing hopeless, when he tripped over what felt like a stick lying in the snow. He narrowly avoided falling flat on his face, while the stick, jerked up by his feet, went slithering down the fell-side. As he picked himself up, it occurred to him that near the top of the Red Pike was not the most likely place in which to find stray sticks lying

THE ASCENT OF THE RED PIKE about. So letting go of Beowulf's harness he said:

"Beowulf, apporte."

He was none too sure that Beowulf had seen the stick, and anyway as it was not his, that he would know that it was the stick he wanted. But Beowulf slipped away down the screes, and in a moment returned with the stick in his mouth. He thrust his face against Alan's left leg to show him that he had it.

Alan said "Out," and took the stick. He felt it, and found that it was a pseudo-shepherd stick, such as was commonly sold in Harwick to trippers, a thin hazel steamed into a narrow crook at the top. It was perfectly useless for catching anything bigger than a month-old lamb, and no shepherd would use or carry such a thing; so it seemed reasonably certain that it had belonged to one of the two townsfolk of whom Alan was in search. And he felt that it was fair to assume that it had been dropped by them on their way down; for, as it had not even fallen off the path, they would surely have stopped to pick it up had they dropped it on the way up; while as they were coming down confused by the snow, it was not altogether unlikely that they should have lost it. Assuming that he was right, it was

useless to look higher, as they must be somewhere off the path below him.

There was only one chance to find them, and that was to send Beowulf to look for them. But it was a desperate chance, for if Beowulf got lost, or anything happened to him so that he could not rejoin his master, which in the frightful storm did not seem unlikely, then Alan would be absolutely helpless and could never get down alone. But having got so far successfully he could not leave even a bad chance untried. He gave Beowulf the scent of the stick's owner from its handle, and then bade him:

"Beowulf, search!"

This word "search" which Alan had always used when asking Beowulf to find something from a scent which was given to him, had been the easiest of all for Beowulf to learn, for it was almost the same, and the accent, slow and drawling, was the same as the word "such" on which he had originally been trained for that work.

Beowulf took the scent off the handle well, for there are few stronger-smelling parts of the body than the palm of the hand, especially as in this case, when the woman who had been holding the stick, had been exhausted and frightened. However, in spite of the clearness of the order THE ASCENT OF THE RED PIKE

and the strength of the scent, Beowulf pretended not to understand what was wanted, and refused to leave his master.

Alan spoke sharply and repeated the order, saying:

"Pfui," then "Sea-a-rch."

Beowulf at once disappeared into the night. Alan sat down to await developments, and in a very short time Beowulf was back. It was plain from his manner that he had not found the people, and Alan felt pretty sure that he had made no very serious effort to look for them.

He sent him out again, and again Beowulf returned after an unsuccessful search which was

not much longer than his first effort.

Alan for a moment was tempted to cry Enough, and to try and find his way home. It was quite possible that Beowulf could not own the line which must be largely obliterated by the snow. And then if Alan sent him away a third time, what if he should take offence and go home, or at any rate hesitate to return for fear of a scolding! It took a deal of courage to send the dog away at all, and remain alone and helpless on the exposed face of the Red Pike. But he knew, really, that Beowulf would never willingly abandon him, and indeed that it was largely a reluctance to

leave himself that prevented him making a serious and lengthy search for the owner of the stick.

He sent Beowulf out a third time, and again awaited his return; but this time instead of being back too soon, he was out so long that Alan became really anxious. In his anxiety the time crawled by and he regretted he had not brought his watch, though even if he had had it, his hands were becoming so cold that he could not easily have opened it, and felt the hands before they became clogged with snow.

He noticed that the snow was becoming sensibly less, and that the wind had dropped. He wondered if this change had only just occurred, or whether he had been too intent on keeping the path, and then on finding the stick and getting Beowulf to go out, to notice it. He listened closely for what he could make of the change in the wind, and presently heard Beowulf panting close below him.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE DESCENT

BEOWULF came to the left side, and pressed his head against his master's leg. Alan, deciding that the thing was impossible, regretfully turned down the path. He took hold of the harness and said:

"Beowulf, forward."

To his surprise Beowulf did not move, but continued nudging him with his muzzle. He put down his hand and found that he had a man's cap in his mouth. The inside of the cap was not cold and stiff but still warm, showing that it had only recently left its owner's head. Alan made much of Beowulf, the more because he had at first refused the work, and then even when he had succeeded, Alan had not at first realised and acknowledged it. Then he again took hold of the harness, this time saying:

"Beowulf, search."

Beowulf immediately left the path, and led away down the fell-side. Alan followed down, feeling with his stick, slipping and sliding, and sometimes even having to let go of the harness to save himself. But every time, as soon as he recovered himself, Beowulf was there at his side, ready to go on directly he should feel his master's hand once more on the harness.

The ground, though steep, was free from crags and not really dangerous; and after a few minutes Beowulf stopped. Alan could feel that he was looking round and up at him and he called. He was immediately answered by a man's voice close beside him.

Both the man and his wife were in a pretty bad way, very stiff and weak from cold. Alan made them take some whisky and then move and thrash about to get their circulation going.

He learnt that, overtaken by the mist and then the snow, they presently became aware that they had lost the path. They could not tell when they had lost it, nor in which direction it lay, so for a time they had tried to keep on down the hill, as best they could without it. It soon became dark, the woman was exhausted and frightened; and they had decided to stop where they were, where there was at least a little shelter from the worst of the wind; and wait till daylight, rather than risk falling over some precipice in the confusion of the storm and darkness.

Suddenly they had noticed Beowulf standing before them. For some little time he had remained there barking, then finding that Alan did not, and probably realising that he could not come, he took the man's cap in his mouth and went off back to his master.

The woman especially was most unwilling to start off again in the darkness, but Alan told them that it was absolutely necessary for them to keep moving, and assured them that he knew the way, although actually he was none too sure of it now that he was off the path, and he did not know if even Beowulf would be able to regain it. She still objected that Alan could not possibly see, and though tempted to remark that that was a good deal truer than she supposed, he simply claimed that as he had got up he could get down again.

At last she was persuaded and they set off, the woman holding on to the back of Alan's coat, and the man holding on to her. The easiest thing for Beowulf would have been to return to the path where he and Alan had left it, and then straight away home. But there seemed little hope of getting the woman up the steep hill, for even if she had the strength she had not the will to climb up and away from home. Alan knew that they were below the path, and that if

they could keep along to the right, at more or less the same level, they must sooner or later cross it. The difficulty would be to know when they did cross it, but he trusted to Beowulf, if not seeing it, at any rate feeling their scent on the way up, and showing it in some way which Alan, knowing the dog so well, would probably be able to interpret.

He faced right, along the fell-side, and gave the order:

"Beowulf, forward."

The ground was rough and steep, and both the townspeople, who were unused to hill walking of any sort, stumbled often. Beowulf never tried to go anywhere where the others could not follow, though more than once he had to turn back to get round some crag or deep ghyll. His inclination was to keep going down, and this Alan wanted to avoid as far as possible, for it meant that they would keep roughly parallel to the path or even diverge away from it; whereas Alan hoped to rejoin it as soon as he could. He would not check Beowulf from going down, for he could not know that a détour was not necessary from the nature of the ground. But to counteract the tendency as far as possible, he said from time to time:

"Beowulf, right, right."

The woman noticed the necessary détours and checks, and she could hear Alan giving orders to Beowulf. She soon learnt that neither man nor dog knew the way as well as Alan had made out, and that Alan was relying a very great deal on the dog. She herself had no faith in any dog, and she became more and more nervous.

The three had scarcely set off, before the snow ceased altogether; and though the sky was still overcast, the clouds were high, above the tops even of the high fells, which could be dimly seen against the general darkness of the night.

Within half an hour the clouds blew clear, and the stars came out one after another, like tiny lamps suddenly lit as the rearguard of the storm clouds swept across the sky. It was as though the wide arched ceiling of the heavens were slowly drawn back.

When Beowulf struck the path he unhesitatingly turned into it. And Alan felt it almost at once from the altered conditions beneath his feet. He breathed a sigh of relief, for now his difficulties were nearly over. He knew that Beowulf would now never leave the path until they regained the road; though he might hesitate for a

direction at the point in the ghyll, where he and Alan had first started on it. But there was no mistaking the ghyll, Alan would know at once what was happening, and could easily give the right order.

The exhausted condition of the woman made frequent rests an absolute necessity, and during one of these halts the man asked for another drink. Alan gave him the flask, which he presently handed back: he did so carelessly, and it was some little time before Alan could put his hand upon it. The starlight reflected off the snow had by then made the night quite clear, and the man's hand with the flask was easily distinguishable against the snow, so that Alan's fumbling was quite obvious. The woman was between them, and for the first time she realised that Alan was blind.

She whispered the information to her husband, low enough as she thought to escape Alan's notice, but he, with his increased sensitivity of hearing, heard her a good deal easier than did her husband. However, he thought it best to pay no attention, and he pretended that he had not heard.

This unfortunate knowledge of Alan's blindness, completely spoilt the last of the woman's

confidence in him; and he had the greatest difficulty in getting her to continue at all.

They came to the ghyll which Alan had come up, and as he expected, Beowulf hesitated. He gave the order:

"Forward!"

And they went across, and on down the path. The woman's nerves were such that the whole party were in considerable difficulties. So, when shortly after crossing the ghyll, they had to skirt some crags where a fall would be dangerous and probably fatal, Alan thought that he ought to say something about it.

"We have to pass a crag now," he said. "For about a hundred yards there is a bit of a drop on our left. And after that the rest of the way is absolutely plain sailing. The path is good and quite wide, and as long as you keep away from the left side you cannot fall.

"Now keep right behind me, please. It is scarcely a hundred yards, and then it does not matter what you do. There is only grass, and if you do fall the worst that can happen is that you might roll for a bit."

Alan had not been on this part of the path on the way up, and being worried by the woman's exhibition of nerves, he forgot that there was a small runnel of water, which crossed the path about two-thirds of the way along the top of the crag. The tiny stream was frozen and there was no sound to warn him. But there was a sheet of smooth ice covering about two feet of the path. This ice was covered with snow and invisible to Beowulf.

Beowulf's rough feet with the thick hair between the toes got a grip on the snow-covered ice, but he felt the danger, and at once stood still to show his master. But he was too late. Alan put his foot on the ice, and his nailed boot slipped.

He only needed the least pull back to safety, but the woman in a panic dropped his coat. And Beowulf feeling him slip made a frantic plunge forward to save him, which only made things worse.

Alan felt himself going, and knowing that his greater weight must pull Beowulf over with him, he just let go of the harness in time before he disappeared over the edge.

The man leant over and called, but he received no answer. And Beowulf, finding that he could not climb down where he was, raced on to the end of the crag, down the slope, and round to the bottom. But he failed to find Alan, who had

THE DESCENT

lodged on a ledge some way up. For a while Beowulf ran frantically back and forth, and up and down, trying in vain from every direction to get in to his master. At last he returned to the two still on the path; he ran up and down once, looking over the edge. Then he stopped, and stood before them barking; but they were not in a position to be of any use to him: the woman was sobbing hysterically, and the man was trying to comfort her.

Beowulf apparently realised that there was nothing to be got from them, for with one last look over the edge, he turned and left them.

CHAPTER XXVII

BEOWULF ON HIS OWN

BEOWULF went to Stonethwaite, and the style of his going was like that of a high-class racing pigeon with a hungry falcon behind it. His long, sliding action, like a big hill fox, was never better revealed than as he raced down across the fell breast with the hill behind him.

He shot up the side of the fell wall, slipped beneath the wire, his harness scraping against it, and, springing down the other side, was fully extended almost in the first stride.

He had gone possibly a dozen yards from the wall, when he tripped and fell. He was going at the top of his speed downhill, and he skidded some way along on his side before he could regain his feet. Almost immediately he fell again, and then a third time. The leash which was doubled, and had been looped across the harness, had been scraped over the harness by the wire. He had put his off hind foot through it, and the first sudden check had come near to breaking his leg.

He snapped impatiently at his leg, jumped up

and went on, only to be thrown again. Again he tried, and again was thrown. Then he sat down, doubled round, felt the leash with his mouth, and settled down to gnaw it through. Within a quarter of a minute the tough leather leash, made of flywheel belting, was cut through as though with a knife.

Beowulf strode on across the fields, not as they had come, but as straight as a line for the distant village. He flew the lower walls clear, and kicked back from the others. As he jumped into the road he turned so quickly that he slipped in the snow and fell; but he was up in a flash and off again.

When he came into the village he did not go to the Vicarage, as might have been expected. He may have known that Mrs. Short would be no good to him, for he turned off before he got there and went up to Doctor Sarum's house: he had never had much to do with women, nor thought much of them, while he knew the doctor well. At Doctor Sarum's house he stood outside the front door barking, till Sarum threw up his bedroom window and looked out. Sarum could only see a shadow on the snow, but he recognised Beowulf's bark, and he hurried down to open the door.

He received a shock as Beowulf slipped in, for the dog was clad from his ears to his tail in a shining armour of ice, where the snow, melted by the warmth of his body, had frozen on the tips of the hairs of his outer coat. With Beowulf in such a state at that time of night, or rather morning, and with his harness on, there could be no doubt that there was something very seriously wrong. So Sarum roused his man, and dressed himself as quickly as he could, while Beowulf ran round him in small circles, getting considerably in his way.

As soon as they were ready, Sarum set off after Beowulf on foot, telling his man to follow in the car. When they came into the village street, and Beowulf turned away from the Vicarage, Doctor Sarum beckoned up his man in the car.

"Go down to the Vicarage," he said. "Wake up Mrs. Short, if she is in bed, and ask her where Mr. Stuart went; then follow after and catch me up. If I leave the road before you come up with me, I'll leave my hat in the road. You will see my foot tracks and can follow on. Be as quick as you can."

Sarum hurried on after Beowulf, but he was not much of a traveller on foot, especially in several inches of snow; and if he had been the original Marathon runner himself, he could not have gone fast enough to please Beowulf, who kept going on in front, and then running back and whining.

When his man caught him up, and reported that Mrs. Short had thought that Alan was at the doctor's house all the time, Sarum became doubly anxious. As the way seemed still along the road, he decided to try and get into the car, and follow faster that way. When he got into the car Beowulf was a good deal worried. He stood at the door for a little crying, then he ran on down the road as before. Immediately Sarum slipped in his clutch and followed slowly after. Beowulf presently seemed to realise what was happening and he ran on in front best pace, only looking back now and then to make sure that the doctor was following.

Presently he sprang on top of the wall on the left of the road, and stood balancing himself there till he saw Sarum stop the car, get out, and climb the wall beside him. All three then went up towards the fell as fast as the doctor could follow; and he was a good deal surprised at the way they were going, for he had heard nothing of the two trippers lost on the Red Pike. He

had seen Alan in the village in the afternoon, and besides Mrs. Short had told his man at what time he had set out, so what on earth he was doing on the Red Pike on such a night he could not conceive. However, Beowulf's manner was so confident that he never once doubted that he knew what he was about, and that Alan Stuart was somewhere before them and in trouble.

The man and his wife were still on the path, at the spot where Alan had fallen, for the woman was quite unable to move another step in the dark. The very real danger of being frozen before morning, in which Alan had found them, was now more or less removed by the three hours or more of activity as they had followed him down.

The man from time to time called down to Alan, but without receiving any answer, though once or twice he thought that he had heard a low moan. But of this he could not be sure, and the moaning, if any, had certainly not been in answer to, or had any connection with, his own calling.

At last to his inexpressible relief he saw the light, which Doctor Sarum carried, moving slowly up the hill towards him. And in half

an hour more the rescue party was near enough to hear and answer his hail.

Beowulf preceded the two men by a minute or more, and sniffed anxiously at the couple on the path, as though he half hoped that they had been able to get Alan up in his absence.

When the doctor arrived he learnt what had happened to Alan, but it was impossible for him to get down to where he lay without a rope. The only thing to be done was to get the two people that he had found down to shelter and warmth as quickly as possible, and it was none too soon as it was, for they were already in a bad way. Then he could get help from one of the quarrymen in the village, a rope, and a bar to which the rope could be made fast, and come back as soon as he could.

Beowulf cared not one dog biscuit what became of the two trippers. He had simply brought Doctor Sarum to the spot from which Alan had fallen, and that they happened to be there too, weighed with him not at all. When he saw that the doctor was preparing to go off with them, and doing nothing about Alan, he was frightfully disappointed. He probably thought that he had not made it clear that Alan had fallen there, for

he ran to and fro between the doctor and the edge of the crags, looking over and crying

pitifully.

Doctor Sarum was a good deal distressed at the necessity of leaving Alan, alive or dead, where he was for the time being; and he was troubled by Beowulf's grief. So when he saw him craning over the edge, and trying for the hundredth time to find a way down, he called to him gently:

"Come on, Beowulf, come on, old man."

Beowulf had been trying to pluck up his courage to the desperate point of going down, and he took the doctor's words for an encouragement to do so.

He gave a last whimper, and slipped over the

edge.

Doctor Sarum heard a scraping noise as he went down, a tearing crackle as he fell through a juniper bush, and the final thud as he fell. Then he heard no more. He called once or twice.

"Beowulf! Beowulf!"

But no whine nor bark answered him.

He hunted his patients back to the car as fast as they could travel, and a good deal faster than they would have liked to. Then he drove like mad back to the village. While he took the exhausted couple into his house, he sent his man in the car to get the village nurse, and one or two men from the Stonethwaite quarries who should bring some ropes and a bar.

As soon as his man returned, he left his patients to the nurse, and set off in the car with the quarrymen to the path up the Red Pike.

Soon after they had left the car, and while they were yet walking up through the fields, it began to lighten a little in the east. And as they climbed up over the slopes of the lower breast, peak after peak was lit up by the rising sun, till mile upon mile of snow-clad fells stood robed in their morning splendour.

None of the party paid the least attention to any scenic effects, however fine, save to bless the coming light, which would make their task of getting down to Alan possible.

When still some way from the crags one of the quarrymen threw up his hand, saying:

"Hark! Will t'."

A moment's silence; then his mate asked:

"What didst t' hear, Joe?"

"I thowt I heerd t' dog gi'e mouth."

BEOWULF

They were about to move on, when it came again, and again—Beowulf's wild and frantic barking.

The rescue party hurried on faster than ever.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MORNING

BEOWULF was not only brave enough to go over the crags after his master, but his courage was so high that he could do it without losing his head. He clung on with his hind feet till the last possible moment, and then he went down with his hocks and quarters under him, and his forelegs braced to take advantage of any little roughness in the surface, and to check his headlong descent.

Soon, in spite of his efforts, his speed was beyond all control. His feet and claws scrabbled madly on the rocks. He crashed through a couple of juniper bushes, which stopped him a little, and fell with a thud almost on to the prostrate body of his master.

He was quite winded, and it was a second or two before he got up and looked about.

In his efforts to break his fall, he had lost two toe-nails, all the hair off the backs of his front pasterns, and from his hind feet up to his hocks; and his pads and buttocks were flayed. But he had no serious injury.

He thrust his muzzle into Alan's face and snuffed. Then as Alan stirred uneasily, he stretched himself out along his body and fell to licking his face.

* * * * *

When Alan fell over the crag, he fell not as Beowulf fell, collected and prepared, but all abroad: he struck once or twice, crashed through the junipers, which as in Beowulf's case broke his fall a little, and fell on to his left shoulder, smashing it.

Though at some point in his fall he hit his head a shrewd knock, it is doubtful if he was ever actually stunned. But he was so badly shaken that he was absolutely muzzy, and he had no idea where he was or what was going on; so that for all practical purposes he was unconscious. Then, weakened by the strain and exhaustion of his climb, and by the shock of his fall, the cold got hold of him, and he slipped into oblivion.

When Beowulf found him he was in this state, and had no idea that the dog was there. But in time the warmth of Beowulf's body on his, and of his tongue on his face revived him.

He shifted about, and at long last sat up. He stared dimly around him, and saw the roseate glory of the peaks, above a white landscape so

bright and dazzling that it hurt his eyes, and only relieved by the deep ghylls, as yet untouched by the sun and still shadowed blue. At first this made little impression upon him; then he thought vaguely that he was dreaming, and that what he saw was the last thing he had seen when he fell the year before, and went blind, and which he remembered as clearly as though it had been yesterday. But through his dream was the throbbing agony of his shoulder. He felt it doubtfully with his right hand, and the sharp increase of the pain brought him at last fully to his senses.

His wondering gaze came back to Beowulf sitting before him: their eyes met, and Beowulf moved excitedly; for in Alan's eyes was again the old quick intelligence which Beowulf had not seen for so long.

Suddenly Alan realised that, by some miracle, the second shock of which the eye specialist had spoken though he did not know it, his eyes were returned to him.

He stared joyously about, while Beowulf shifted uneasily before him. Then he turned to Beowulf again, his face alight. He reached forward and twined his right hand in his harness.

Then, gently swaying him to and fro, he said:

"Oh, Beowulf! Beowulf!"

And Beowulf, his tail thrashing the ground, and mad with joy, threw up his head, and barked, and barked.

* * * * *

Beowulf's barking only added to the anxiety of the rescue party; so Doctor Sarum could scarcely at first credit his good fortune, when he found Alan not only alive and well but with his sight returned.

There was no need even for one of the quarrymen to descend to the ledge where Alan and Beowulf were. The crowbar was firmly driven into the path above them for safety, and then the rope was let down; while the doctor climbed round the end of the crag and waited below to receive them. Alan tightened up the girth of Beowulf's harness as much as he could, so that there could be no chance of him slipping out, and then tied the end of the rope to the steel handle.

He was handicapped a good deal by the total loss of the use of his left arm and hand. And there could be few higher tests of Beowulf's courage and obedience, than when he allowed himself, without resistance or struggling, to be swung out off the ledge and lowered by those

above to the waiting doctor below. Especially might he have been expected to make a fuss, as he was still bruised and sore from his last attempt to go down over crags.

When the rope had been freed from Beowulf, and pulled up once more to Alan's level, he took a turn about his chest and then made the end fast around his thigh. Then he let himself over the edge and was lowered gently down to join Beowulf.

Beowulf from below watched his descent with far more anxiety than he had displayed over his And as Alan came down, he two or three times sprang up, as far as he could, against the crag face to meet him. He was so exercised over his master's safety, that he was a nuisance even with Doctor Sarum, whom he knew and trusted so well that it was to him that he had turned in his direst extremity. For when Sarum, in preparation for the walk home, put Alan's left arm in a temporary sling, and the broken bone grated, causing Alan to make some half-involuntary exclamation, Beowulf thrust himself between them in a flash. He would not go so far as to seize the doctor, but he would not leave his place between them till Alan had reassured him.

They had the best part of a two-mile walk

before they could reach the road where the car was; and as soon as the two quarrymen and Doctor Sarum's man had come down from above, and joined the others, they set off. Alan was still feeling pretty sick, partly from the pain in his shoulder, now thoroughly alive, partly from the shock of his fall, and also the ill-effects of the cold when he was lying unconscious or nearly He leant a good deal at times on Doctor Sarum for support, which Beowulf did not altogether like, for he thought that it was his right to give any help that was needed. And he could not altogether get used to the fact that Alan could now see, and no longer needed his eyes to guide him. At first he seemed doubtful what he ought to do, then he put himself in his old place by his master's left side and continued walking there, in case Alan should lay hold of the harness; and from time to time he looked around and up to see that all was well. Whenever he did so and met Alan's eyes, his tail would begin to sway gently from side to side.

Beowulf's scratches received in descending the crags soon entirely healed; and Alan felt no lasting effects from his fall except a tendency to rheumatism in his shoulder, and occasional irritation in the fingers of his left hand which had

been slightly frozen from the weakened circulation in the broken arm.

* * * * *

If you go to Stonethwaite now and visit the church of a Sunday morning, you may see an old sable dog lying at the vestry door. He no longer wears the harness, that highest badge of loyalty; for the harness has been returned to the Association to which it belongs, and is now worn by another dog leading another blind man in far different circumstances in London.

As the service comes to an end, and the well-known step sounds on the stone-flagged floor, Beowulf gets quickly to his feet. If it has been a warm day, and he has been lying out in the sun, instead of on his rug inside, he will hurry into the porch, a little stiffly now, for he is old and his muzzle is grey and frosted.

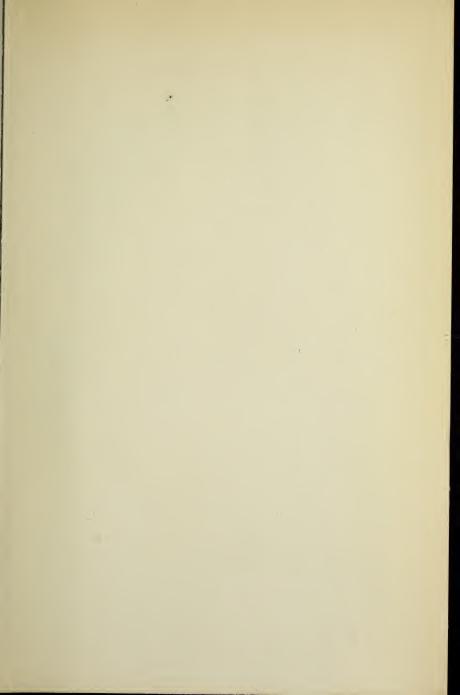
Alan comes into the vestry, and his face lights up, as he sees the welcome in the eyes, a little dim and clouded now, which for nearly a year had served him so bravely for his own.

THE END











HV2345 Vesey, Ernest c.2
V Blakeman.
BEOWULF; GUIDE DOG TO THE
BLIND.
(1936)

Date Due		1		
HV2345 V	Vesey,	Ernest	Blal	c.2 keman
BEOWULF	; GUIDE	DOG TO	THE	BLIND.
(1936)				
DATE		ISSU	ED TO	

AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND 15 WEST 16th STREET NEW YORK, N. Y. 10011

